

# **The Call of the World, A Levinasian Response**

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I continue to be thrilled each time I see the turbine as a fixture at Exhibition Place on Toronto's lakeshore.

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## Foreword

My Major Research Paper (MRP) has fulfilled the requirements of my Master of Environmental Studies degree addressing the various aspects of my Plan of Study by bringing together the ideas and perplexities that I encountered in my program. While my MRP omitted much that was contained in my Plan, it also included, reformulated, expanded and critically wove together a great proportion of it.

I knew I wanted to:

- a) grasp the theoretical shift that had taken place in academia since I completed my undergraduate degree;
- a) explore various narratives regarding nature and our relationship to it;
- b) include the work of the Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School);
- c) engage the work of Emmanuel Levinas with respect to environmentalism;
- e) link theory and practice by including a planning perspective;
- f) take theory to practicality with respect to renewable energy by working with the Toronto Renewable Energy Co-operative and its offshoot Windshare.

My MRP managed to formulate a blend of these parts of my Plan, incorporating both my Area of Concentration and my components in a rather different way than I had anticipated. With continued research, writing and consultation came the realization that the structure and premises of the enterprise as originally conceived lacked a thematic conceptualization, and therefore a reformulation was required. Overall I think my MRP has both stayed true to my initial intentions while at the same time surpassed them.

## **Abstract**

This paper addressed my desire to respond to the devastation of nature through the post-phenomenological thought of Emmanuel Levinas. Its intent was to describe Levinas's event of the pre-cognitive face-to-face encounter with the radical alterity of the Other as ethical, an appeal that commands a responsible response to the otherness of the Other. The paper presents discourses that address the conceptual roots of our environmental destruction. The first discourse is a critique of the Scientific Revolution of the Enlightenment that sees the shift from a medieval world-view to one structured along scientific-rational terms as the problematic. The second looks at our relationship to nature through the work of the Institute for Social Research (the first wave of the Frankfurt School) who saw the objectifying universal character of reason itself via the concept as having led to our domination of both outer and inner nature (ourselves). The paper brings Levinas's development of singular infinite ethical responsibility into view providing a way to move beyond the impasses of the prior discourses as well as the perceived absence of ethics in poststructuralism/postmodernism theories. Levinas's thought offers us an insight into the realm of the environmental movement as a political and institutional response to the cry of nature as a face-to-face event. The paper has implications for planning as well as policy directions. It does so by focussing on the establishment of the first wind turbine in an urban setting on Toronto's lakeshore by the Toronto Renewable Energy Co-operative (TREC) as a model for the production/ownership/management of power in Ontario.

# THE CALL OF THE WORLD, A LEVINASIAN RESPONSE

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## **Section I**

### **1.0 Introduction**

It is with some distance of time and place that I approach this last productive effort required of me by the faculty. While the academic milieu is no longer as prominent a feature of my everyday life, the discussions entered into in this paper, by virtue of their philosophical nature, grapple with questions that have been and will continue to be posed as part of the ongoing conversations in which we are engaged. At the same time, the heightened visibility and topicality of “the environment” and the greater sense of urgency with respect to its deterioration has meant the retention of the timeliness of this paper. With nothing less than the Earth itself at stake, increased relevance can however, paradoxically betray the need to move beyond what appears to be the ever-increasing expansion in greenwashing strategies and techniques, making it that much more important for us to come to terms with the damage we continue to inflict on a planet increasingly incapable of self-repair.

This paper is also in many ways connected to some of the perplexities I encountered in my postgraduate program. I had completed the majority of my undergraduate work at a time when the dominant discourse in the university was that of structural Marxism as a critical understanding of the world. When I returned to York, the conversation had changed, and with my reading of Foucault and others, I began to grapple with making sense of what had taken place to bring about this epistemological turn. My participation in the Faculty of Environmental Studies also made it important for me to contextualize the environmental movement and concerns generated in this area of study into my own understanding, as well as into the considerations of my paper. Consequently, this paper is in part an attempt to come to terms with transformations, both in the ideas, the conversations and the specific area of study, as a blending

process of these factors. For me, the tenor and the linguistic turn in the conversations that greeted my return to York can best be described as a change in the way in which subjectivity is conferred: from an Althusserian “hail” delivered by the social structure, to a Levinasian subjectivity as a responsible response to the call of the Other’s alterity.

Yet, at its heart, this paper is concerned with delineating what does not lend itself to thematization, yet must inevitably be put into words. Its intent is to describe the event of the encounter with the radical alterity of the non-human Other, an Other that lies beyond the ego and its assimilations, interrupting us in our Being with an anterior language, an appeal and command that escapes the grasp of identity. It is in the call for a responsible response to the otherness of the other that we will glimpse an unrepresentable anarchic beginning, showing itself only after the event, responding to a call that precedes itself. While it can be said that non-human nature is far removed from the ideas of the post-phenomenological philosopher, Talmudic commentator and thinker Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), it is in the pursuit of his idea of the singularity of infinite ethical responsibility for the Other that we will hope to locate this moment, as a point from which the non-human Other may not be lost.

This paper began with a desire to respond to the crisis afflicting the environment as a motivation that would exceed an academic exercise. The development by TREC (Toronto Renewable Energy Co-operative), and its offshoot Windshare of a wind turbine on Lake Ontario elicited my excitement as it represented the possibility of writing about the actualization of the turbine, an opportunity to be constructive, to do more than theorize. Yet when the writing began, the wind turbine seemed to require a theoretical discussion and context from which to advocate on its behalf. The theoretical possibilities of the writings of Emmanuel Levinas presented such an opportunity, and rather than receding, the wind turbine’s move to the Addendum allowed for



a space to develop so that its presentation could emerge out of an environmental movement that was, in a post-Levinasian fashion, responding to the call of a devastated nature. Post-Levinasian environmentalism would not advocate for mutual reciprocity, compassion, respect, participating consciousness, depth over shallowness, or interconnectedness with nature; it would not point to the ways in which we are a part of a holistic natural world, identifying with nature through a wider sense of self, nor would it turn to ecocentrism as the reversal of anthropocentrism. What it would do, out of nothing but the sheer otherness of the other, is see the possibility of encountering the non-human other non-violently and responsibly.

The present work is divided into six sections. The second of these, entitled, Discourses Regarding the Conceptual Roots of our Environmental Devastation, begins by portraying two academic discourses that represent significant positions in the ongoing historical conversation concerning what we have come to define as nature. Their presentation lays out what each perceives as having defined our current relationship to nature, and in so doing, the question of ethics is raised. The inclusion of these discourses anticipates the Levinasian proposal that provides a way of moving beyond their impasses as they have forgotten Levinas's pre-cognitive ethical moment of exteriority, an event that occurs before all else, as once cognition takes place the ethical moment has passed.

The first chapter in this section presents the view that it is the Enlightenment, with the advent of the Scientific Revolution, that is responsible for the "disenchantment of the world" and hence the transformation in the West from a traditional medieval/religious system of representation to one where that relationship is structured through scientific-rational terms. This discourse proceeds by presenting our relationship to the medieval world and non-human nature as one dominated by "meaningfulness," indicative of a relationship that is more metaphysically

empathetic, a symbolically oriented outlook. This discourse points to the advent of the Scientific Revolution and the modern period as the conceptual problematic, responsible for the transformation of our relationship with nature into one that is instrumentally rational. The conclusion of this theory is that the shift to scientific rationalism and literal interpretation has led to our complete control and domination of nature (relegated to a meaningless objective realm) in the search for the practical uses for the things of nature.

The second chapter in this section conveys selections from the neo-Marxist theories of the Frankfurt School for Social Research through the works of two of its principle members, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Though this discourse shares some understandings with the previous one, unlike the contention that views the shift to the scientific-rational mode of apprehending reality in the modern world as responsible for our current relationship with nature, it is the argument of Critical Theory that it is the universal characteristic of objectifying reason itself, via the concept, that leads to the domination of outer nature and hence, the link to the domination of the self (inner nature) and others. Rather than having arisen at some historical period, as a distinctive mark of the demythologization of nature, “the disease of reason is that reason was born from man’s urge to dominate nature” (Horkheimer 1974, 176). This discourse lends itself to a heightened sophistication compared to the previous one, as the Frankfurt School argument emerges dialectically, with the limits of the Enlightenment having always remained for them dialectical, as the reason that dominates as pure calculation is at the same time linked to the possibility of a different and emancipatory reason. Their goal was to rescue reason in the hope that reason might change by bringing instrumental reason (concerned with means and aims) to critical reflection (ends).

The third section of the paper, Ethics Rather Than Relativism, examines the theoretical shifts that have directed us in a poststructural/postmodern direction, in order to show how the work of Levinas can address the difficulties that have been identified with this theoretical position. This section outlines what can be understood as a turning away from the hegemony of structuralism to a poststructural/postmodern understanding of the world. Politically, this shift is described in chapter one through the events of May, 1968, in Paris. Theoretically, it is traced through the development of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics to the turn in theory described through the discourse of the end of metanarratives by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998). Its intent is to contextualize the debates and discourses that define what has been described as a "post-metaphysical" age, a state of affairs where we can no longer subscribe to the pursuit of objective descriptions such as an unmediated real, to irrefutable truths or to the autonomous subject. The greatest challenge with respect to these developments has been suggestive of an ethical void. It is in the very refusal to ascribe to essences (to ask and know what something truly is in its manifestation), absolutes and totalities that we will turn to the work of Emmanuel Levinas who presents us with an understanding that is ethical precisely because of this refusal. Levinas provides us with a path that leads out of the ethical problematic that has plagued a poststructural/postmodern age where our theoretical categories have left behind, amongst other things, the self-determining will of the human individual as the measure of all things.

It is in Section IV, In and Beyond Discourse, that the paper will provide some of the ideas of Levinas's ethics of the Other and place these into a theoretical as well as a political context. The discussion will begin by outlining the phenomenological method as developed by Edmund Husserl and show how Levinas uses Martin Heidegger to move beyond Husserl while consequently moving beyond Heidegger as well. Further chapters in this section will proceed

using the terms and phraseology Levinas uses to shape his work. Our attempt to render Levinasian themes comes up against Levinas's own problematic, rational activity is unable to step outside (transcend) the totalizing logic of metaphysical systems (referred to as ontology) without supposing or restoring them. Despite the impasse of the conceptual problematic of always being inside language, these terms will be appealed to, as they must be. It is in their insistence on the alterity of and responsibility toward the Other that we will hope to glimpse the long forgotten phenomenological description of the pre-original intersubjective encounter as the immediacy of the face-to-face, a passing instant, now deduced from principles long since abstracted from the approach of the Other. It is this ethical moment, an interruption of intentional consciousness from without, that the paper will attempt to bring into focus, and in this attempt it will ultimately fail, as it must.

In similar fashion, it is in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974) that Levinas's writing is rendered performatively as he attempts to translate into ontological language what escapes conceptuality (ontology). While for Levinas, ethical responsibility for the other precedes political judgements, he does provide a way of developing the ethical relationship with the Other into the social and political domain and into a just society. While condemned to betrayal, the ontological (cognition/thematization) is haunted by the irreducible alterity of the infinite Other as a trace. What comes back to us as a trace retains the ethical moment, and it is in this return that the political aspect of the paper in the final chapter of this section hopes to show the development of Levinas's views into the realm of justice. So, while Levinas's writings are (in keeping with his phenomenological orientation) phenomenologically descriptive rather than proscriptive, to understand him politically is to bring ethics to justice as its very basis.

It is also my intent in this paper to speak about the view that proposes the applicability of Levinas's reflections to nature as the non-human other (even though Levinas himself may not have agreed with this). With this in mind, the intention of Section V, The Discourse of the Environmental Movement is Based on the Ethical Relationship, is to stress the environmental movement as the return of the ethical trace in the political. This section of the paper will contextualize the environmental movement through a post-Levinasian lens. The movement as a political response to the call of nature addresses the continuing catastrophe of the destruction of species and ecosystems and the growing threat to the basic conditions essential to life. Addressing the non-human in a way that takes into account Levinasian responsibility is to presuppose the event of the encounter with the Other as a proto-ethical moment for which Levinas claims ethics as first philosophy (not a theory of ethics but an ethics of ethics *before* thinking). So, while the issue must begin from the Levinasian premise of a prior proto-ethical relationship of responsibility for the other that is based on inequality, non-reciprocity and asymmetry, placing an obligation on me that makes the other more than my equal, commanding and summoning me from height and destitution, this "prior" (beyond time) begins the task of debate and action in the arena of the systemic and political, and I would add the environmental. These are the sites of totality where environmental studies and the environmental movement reside and where there is a responsibility to the whole world that must be negotiated. But everything rests on the ethical relationship.

## **Section II     DISCOURSES REGARDING THE CONCEPTUAL ROOTS OF OUR ECOLOGICAL CRISIS**

### **2.0     The Critique of the Scientific Revolution as the Domination of Nature**

The critique of the Scientific Revolution as the domination of nature imbues this event with responsibility for profoundly changing the relationship we have had with the natural world. It sees the most pronounced alteration between human beings and what we have defined as nature as a result of the shift from a religious medieval paradigm to a modern scientific-rational view of the world. Science did not, however, develop in a vacuum, but was itself a part of the intellectual project of the Enlightenment that was characterized by scepticism towards Church doctrines, individualism, a belief in science and the experimental method, the use of reason and critical thought, and a demand for freedom and political representation aimed toward human emancipation. Its main social and political outcome was the French Revolution. It was the Scientific Revolution that most significantly transformed our relationship to nature; its most influential and pervasive aspects were not its facts, but rather its new method of inquiry and its new criterion of truth, not as revelation, but as a true and accurate representation of reality (Randall 1976, 253). The new logic, what would in time come to be called modern science, developed as a slow and complex separation from many occult varieties of magic and alchemy that at the time were the primary alternatives to the power of the medieval church and state who together sanctioned a combination of Aristotelianism and Christian dogma (Kearney 1981, 35, 47, 52; Leiss 1974, xi, 74, 75, 150). The move away from this authority required a break with the physical writings of Aristotle (384-322 BC) that were salvaged from the Arabs of Spain as the starting point for all apperceptions of reality that Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) and others synthesized with Christian faith.

### **2.0.1 The Medieval World-View**

Prior to the discourse of modern rationalism, a religious world-view explained the conditions of the time as residing in a heavenly sphere. It was during this period that the purpose of the search for knowledge of nature was not a search for the laws of nature, but consisted primarily in achieving knowledge of the divine will which underlay them: the will of God (Berman 1981, 51; Evernden 1992, 42). This made nature's symbolic content far more significant than its material content, all reality possessing a signification which transcended the crudeness of mere material reality (Evernden 1992, 42). In the medieval view, knowing the material aspects of an object did not give access to the significant divine aspect of being; "to stop with things themselves" was to miss what mattered, the meaning and significance of things that gave purpose to existence (Ibid., 43-44). In this world, fact and value, epistemology and ethics, the good and the true were identical. "What do I know?" and "How should I live?" were indistinguishable questions (Berman 1981, 40, 51). In this world, knowledge of things, of nature, was not looked upon solely or even primarily with the aim of looking after the material needs of the human race, but served other needs as well (Harrison 1999, 91, 92). In this role, natural objects symbolized eternal verities, or taught important lessons concerning standards of moral behaviour (Ibid., 91). In this scheme of things nature was to be "known" in a richly symbolic way in order to determine spiritual and moral meaning (Ibid., 91). The image of nature as alive, sensitive, and female, particularly the conception of nature as a nurturing mother, imposed normative cultural constraints respecting the actions of humans on the Earth, while the metaphorical re-conceptualization of nature, begun with the advent of the Scientific Revolution, transformed a previously alive female nature into dead matter (Merchant 1983, 3, 4). Depriving

nature of any qualities beyond measurement meant that nature was open to be used without constraint (Berman 1981, 126; Harvey 1996, 134).<sup>1</sup>

## **2.0.2 The New Scientific-Rational Method and World-View**

The ideas and developments that culminated in the Scientific Revolution have been traced to the seventeenth century and the writings of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who were representative of the new scientific method. The violent shift in perspective each author was grappling with represented an epistemology that was revolutionary at the time but now is part of “the air we breathe” (Berman 1981, 29). It was Rene Descartes’s new method that conceived the world as composed of distinct subjects and knowable objects. The accurate identity between the subject and the object became the prerequisite for the knowledge of truth. Descartes, a rationalist, discounted human sense experience convinced of the certainty of the mathematical properties of nature believed, in the last analysis, that knowledge of nature depended on the progressive expunging of the mind from the phenomenal world, separating the thinker from the world that was confronted as nature in order to keep emotions from interfering with the judgments that form the basis of scientific knowledge. Human beings (essentially soul, consciousness, or “thinking substance”) were ontologically divorced from nature and their own physical bodies. Francis Bacon (writing some 17 years before Descartes) argued that the dominant philosophy of his time unwittingly projected false notions into nature, whereby human concerns were being read into the order of nature in an abstract manner. He proposed that this identification of human interests with the natural order had to be frustrated and

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<sup>1</sup> Common perceptions of the time saw the rocks of the earth as its bones, the rivers as veins, the forests as hair and the cicadas as dandruff (Berman 1981, 74). Similarly, a man’s face and hands were seen to resemble the soul to which they were joined, a concept retained in palmistry, even as it is practiced today (Ibid.).



once liberated from locating in nature the source of particular social and ethical standards, humanity would be able to develop a picture of nature's *modus operandi*, thereby being able to fulfil human desires. The elimination of naturalistic categories means in this context that nature ceases to be a basis for limitations on the scope of human behaviour.<sup>2</sup> With the end of human consciousness projecting itself into external nature in search for security and validation of standards of conduct, nature can be viewed as a generalized object of investigation, as a system of matter in motion – an object of conquest. The experience of being dominated by nature, by external standards grounded in nature, gave way to expressing the achievement of man's domination over nature. Bacon's empiricism, his description of scientific experimentation as "vexing nature" and his spirit of "enlarging the bounds of the human empire over nature" is viewed as representing our control and domination of nature (Best and Kellner 1997, 198; Randall 1976, 208).

When the new scientific-rational method was initially proposed, it shook the foundations of religion and ethics as well as those of the received science. Religion was expected to guarantee the responsible use of nature's power, serving as the essential ground for science as a social enterprise (Leiss 1974, 196). Early proponents of the new science recognized this and relied on the presence of religion to ensure that an ethical void did not develop (Ibid., 194).

Refuge in the faith of traditional religious dogmas eventually, however, also collapsed.

Disenchantment and secularization replaced religion; its will to truth meant that the quest for

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<sup>2</sup>An example can be taken from the art of metallurgy that was compared to obstetrics, ores perceived as growing in the womb of the earth like embryos (Berman 1981, 88). The miner or metalworker was therefore meddling in sacred territory and down to the fifteenth century the sinking of a new mine was accompanied by religious ceremonies including fasting, praying and a particular series of rituals in which miners engaged least the earth strike back against man for this incursion into its womb (Ibid., 88). These incursions were effected in a context which sought harmony with nature and where its mastery would have been regarded as a contradiction in terms (Ibid. p.98).

universal knowledge of the “real” world became the known or knowable world to a newly developing free and autonomous individual. This is a world that rejected God’s claim to determine human fate. The synthesis of the Christian-Aristotelian world-view in the Middle Ages, that saw the good and the true as identical, was irrevocably dismantled in the seventeenth century. With the rise of the scientific-rational world-view, facts were separated from values (the fact/value distinction) and epistemology from ethics (a shift from “why” to “how”) proclaiming the self-sufficiency of human reason, and abandoning the most solid ground on which moral instruction had rested (Docherty 1993, 10; Bauman 2004, 219). The “despiritualization” of nature, its steady weakening as a prescriptive force for humanity was held responsible for creating an ethical and ideational void (Leiss 1974, 185). This is an issue that emerged with the dawn of the Scientific Revolution, at which time the sacred and manipulative were split down the middle (Berman 1981, 99). The latter could survive in a context of profit, expanding technology, and secular salvation; in fact that was what the manipulative aspect was all about, severed from its religious basis (Ibid.).

The new framing of nature (the idea of nature being a deeply cultural historical construct) resulted in a conception of nature consisting entirely of extensional properties related to each other within a causal matrix (Brown 2003, 3, 7). This is a world that sees nature as valid in terms of its measurability, reducible to controllable mathematical laws, consequently disqualifying all that is not calculably verifiable as knowledge. Spearheaded as the Enlightenment project of demythologizing and disenchanting the world, in its most advanced stages this project was deployed by a positivism that originated with French philosophers Henri de-Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Auguste Comte (1798-1857) (Cahoone 2003, 5; Leiss 1974, 150). Positivism was marked by a rejection and abandonment of philosophy’s metaphysical musings and ethical

pretensions as not constitutive of knowledge advocating the scientific method as the only genuine form of true knowledge, because it alone was empirically verifiable. This position carried the campaign to the heart of conceptual thought, upholding the notion that only propositions conforming to one notion of verifiable knowledge – only observable phenomena and quantifiable verification using the objective scientific method could provide positive knowledge of the world or have any meaning.

### **2.0.3 The Fate of the Good and the True**

The methodology of modern natural science became the model for making all objective judgments. The scientific-rational world-view split goodness off from truth. Goodness suffered two fates. Whatever fit into the scientific-rational frame of reference was conceptualized as “real” and “true” and therefore good. What was not able to meet this yardstick of “objectivity” was relegated to the realm of the merely subjective-relative and dismissed. In its grasp of the real as the true, the scientific-rational view of the world was able to abandon goodness. Secularization’s increasing commitment to rationalizing theories of goodness in terms of the concept of truth also led to another development. In this sense, the objectively scientific true becomes the good. In this vein, Nietzsche (1844-1900) proposed the reversed convergence of ethics and epistemology, “as the goodness that the latter finds in truth” seeing all truth as the “illusions which we have forgotten are illusions” (cited in Cohen 1986, 2).

The result is the belief that scientific and technological achievement leads to ethical progress. This assumption relied on scientific knowledge to help humanity become morally enlightened. The Age of Enlightenment and Reason considered reason as an autonomous force, and it was hoped that this rationality would broaden into other domains improving the conditions

of social relationships (Leiss 1974, 21). The hope and dream was that control and mastery over nature may also be a major instrument of human self-control, a means of achieving rational intelligence in order to create moral and just societies (Ibid., 21). This has been a principle article of faith of modern Western civilization which has been stretched if not destroyed by the experiences of fascism, which have demonstrated how the civilized face of modernity is attended constantly by a barbarism which is its other side, requiring a total re-evaluation of the power and limits of reason, as reason is not inherently good (Docherty 1993, 12, 13; Leiss 1974, 21, 27).

#### **2.0.4 Closing Statements**

The critique of the Scientific Revolution as laying the conceptual ground for the modern scientific-rational world-view sees the split between a self-certain isolated subject and a meaningless objective realm as responsible for our environmental devastation. When the split is described as the fact-value distinction it is typically invoked in the Western philosophy of ethics in order to avoid making the “naturalistic fallacy,” the attempt to draw ethical conclusions (normative values) from factual premises (or the other way around). It proposes that it is impossible to derive an “ought” from an “is,” values from facts. This is a denial of the belief that greater knowledge will lead to greater morality. Having theoretically separated facts and values and awakening the possibility (Kant (1724-1804) would say the necessity) that the realm of facts is split off from the realm of values, the Kantian move was a response to this split, and attempted to establish reason as the foundation of ethics (Davis 1996, 53; Docherty 1993, 10).

To call for the reintroduction of values (intrinsic or not) into our relationship with nature assumes their absence, asserting that the scientific-rational world-view inaugurated the distinction between facts and values, ethics and epistemology and is responsible for our current

relationship with respect to nature lends credence to the distinction when none necessarily exists, a pseudo-problem. The notion of the distinction has in fact somewhat collapsed. It was challenged by phenomenology as an attempt to think beyond the conceptual dichotomies of fact-value (as well as mind/body/world), a critique of the subject/object difference. A recent challenge can be said to have emerged from the poststructural/postmodern disillusionment with the correspondence of thought and object model of reality, weakening the hold that the scientific method has had in its insistence that as an activity it approximated more and more closely the truth in nature. The work of Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996), originating in the philosophy of science, can be cited as contributing to the disenchantment of science with his publication, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), challenging the notion that science was not subject to narrative, and shaking the foundations of scientific certainty. Even though the social sciences have been seen as interpretive in searching for meaning, thereby being perceived as different from the natural sciences, it has been Kuhn's contention that the difference is a misconception (Bird 2000, 268-269; Kellner and Roderick 1981, 161). In spite of the fact that for the most part the scientific community has stubbornly attempted to retain its hold on the facts as distinct from values by charging the philosophy of science with "excessive postmodernism" in Kuhn's work, he has nonetheless been influential in making the point that even our scientific facts are derived from values. Kuhn's position and his influence is captured by the following statement,

[This] distinction disappears once we realize that the logical empiricists sold us a bill of goods about natural science. Once we awaken from our positivist slumbers we realize that none of these features hold of natural science either. The two turn out to be one, not for the positivist reason that there is no rational place for hermeneutics; but for the radically opposite reason that all sciences are equally hermeneutic (Kellner and Roderick 1981, 162).

The same can be said for the call of values to be re-infused into our relationship with nature, the distinction never applied, it was constructed and structured so, and to call for its reversal is in some sense to presuppose it.

## **2.1 The Frankfurt School Critique of Reason as the Domination of Nature**

To the Enlightenment, that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion; modern positivism writes it off as literature ... What men want to learn from Nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, 4-6, 7).

The goal of Habermas's project can be expressed in one sentence: to prevent social relations from becoming like our relations with the natural world (Eckersley 1992, 108).

While the tradition of the early Institute for Social Research, known as the Frankfurt School, refused to utter a positive theory of the normative, this reticence has been cited as anything but a moral deficiency in their unique neo-Marxian unwillingness to speculate on the final form of what might be called "the moral" (Horowitz 2000, 295-296). David Harvey has credited the Institute with "the frontal attack upon the ideology of domination of nature" (Harvey 1996, 33). The critiques of the Frankfurt School – particularly Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse – to the discourses of man and nature were innovative and provocative opening up a proliferating trail of thought that has remained persistent and influential (Ibid.).<sup>3</sup>

The early Frankfurt School saw the "struggle for existence" and the structuring objectivization of the object we practice via concepts, not as a result of the Scientific Revolution or the modern period but as a prior existence. Horkheimer, in the *Eclipse of Reason* (1947) states

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the Critical Theory of the Institute of Social Research was never a fully articulated philosophy applied similarly by members of the Institute. Rather, it consisted of shared assumptions, which distinguished their approach from bourgeois or "traditional" theory (Buck-Morss 1977, 65).

that the domination of nature, or the expansion of human power in the world, was a universal characteristic of human reason, rather than a distinctive mark of the modern period exemplified by the development of methodological science and its coupling with technological progress (Horkheimer 1974, 176).<sup>4</sup> He comments that,

The disease of reason is that reason was born from man's urge to dominate nature ... One might say that the collective madness that ranges today, from the concentration camps to the seemingly most harmless mass-culture reactions, was already present in germ in primitive objectivization, in the first man's calculating contemplation of the world as prey (Ibid.).

For Horkheimer, objectivization is a universal that has existed as a tool through which the chaotic, disorganized data of sensations and perception become organized into coherent structures that give rise to exact knowledge (Leiss 1974, 143, 148). Thinking “the object” does not solely hinge on the advent of the modern period or capitalism, having been a possibility of natural-historical life and a condition of human self-preservation (Jarvis 1998, 167). We seek clear distinctions and categories which structuralists view as a normal attribute of the human mind (Evernden 1986, 37). Separating “nature” and “society” is an act as old as human society itself, reflective of the logical structure of the mind with its need to form categories out of continua, to release us from the confusion of the background (Evernden 1986, 37; Leiss 1974, xii). This process is repeatedly re-engaged as a useful common denominator with respect to how we think. Yet, the separation of society and nature is for the most part an illusion; nature and culture are intertwined, there are no concepts of “pure” nature and “pure” culture; nature in Woodsworth's phrase “rolls through all things” (cited in Llewelyn 1991, 116). The true character of social development is but a series of increasingly more complex states of nature, with human activity a constitutive factor in the evolutionary process (Jarvis 1998, 33; Leiss 1974, xii).

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that critical theorists were never against science or technology per se, rather they were against scientism (the conviction that empiric-analytic science is the only valid access to knowledge) and the dominance of instrumental reason (Eckersley 1992, 51, 153).

Horkheimer's comment also addresses a direct universal relationship between our existence – our pragmatic need to survive – and our need to take from nature. In every historical period man has pursued a struggle with nature in order to ensure survival and maintain existence (Leiss 1974, 106). Attempts to “dominate” the environment occur in the sense that the environment's usefulness must be regarded in relation to existence (Ibid.). It may be said that, “... men wage a kind of warfare against the natural environment by way of [a] response to the pressures of the struggle for existence” (Ibid., 143).<sup>5</sup> For Adorno and Horkheimer there was no time “before” domination. Similarly, this relationship existed prior to capitalism, and appears likely to them to survive the demise of capitalism. For Adorno and Horkheimer, class domination existed before capitalist class domination. Ending capitalism with its property relations might not itself secure an end to domination, which appeared likely to continue and intensify after capitalism ended (Harvey 1996, 133; Jarvis 1998, 28). For Horkheimer and Adorno, the disease is not capitalism but Western reason itself (McGowan 1991, 95).

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche was of the opinion that the one thing that characterizes all human beings is the drive to dominate the environment (Stumpf 1971, 380). This drive, which is central to human nature is The Will to Power (Ibid.). But for Nietzsche, this will to power is more than the will to survive, it is an inner drive to express a vigorous affirmation of all of man's powers evidenced by Nietzsche's statement that, “the strongest and highest Will to Life does not find expression in a miserable struggle for existence, but in a Will to War. A Will to Power, a Will to Overpower!” (Ibid.) Moral values were to be built upon the true nature of man and his environment, not upon the “life-denying negativeness of the Christian ethics” (Ibid., 379, 384). It was the internal power within man, “a power which uses and exploits the environment,” exploitation viewed not as a depraved act, but belonging to “the nature of the living being as a primary function” (Ibid., 381, 384). Exploitation was the “consequence of the intrinsic Will to Power, which is precisely the Will to Life – a fundamental fact of all history ...” (Ibid.). Nietzsche found his affirmation of life in Homer's gods – Dionysus (representing no restraints or barriers, defying all limitations) and Apollo (as the symbol of order, restraint and form) – their fusion was symbolized in the power of man to create beauty through art. This fusion could provide modern culture with a relevant and workable standard of behaviour at a time when religious faith was unable to provide a compelling vision of man's destiny (Ibid. p.378, 379). Nietzsche's ideal became the passionate man who had his passions under control (Ibid. p.385).



At the same time, the ecological contradictions of capitalism, the demand that corporations maximize profits, does not and cannot be concerned with ecological capacity. The ecological struggle has increasingly been described as coming into conflict with the laws that govern the capitalist system: the laws of the extraction of surplus value and the maximization of profit. Michael Bosquet put it well when he said, “the ecological logic is purely and simply the negation of capitalist logic; the earth can’t be saved within the framework of capitalism, the Third World can’t be developed according to the model of capitalism” (cited in Marcuse 1996, 53).<sup>6</sup> The environmental crisis, as the “quintessential crisis of capitalism” (the phrase belongs to the late Rudolf Bahro (1935-1997), co-founder of the West German Green Party), has been explored through a critique of the externalization of costs as yet a further contradiction of capitalism (cited in Eckersley 1992, 19). Continuing shifts within capitalism itself have also necessitated self-reflection on the part of Marxism with elements within Marxism attempting to come to terms with ecological challenges. Bahro and Gorz began to rethink issues of growth and sustainable development. Daniel Cohn-Bendit (a French-German politician and student leader during the May, 1968, riots in France) began a movement from red to green that maintained emancipatory ideals with respect to humanity, while tempering them with the necessary cohabitation between humanity and the rest of nature (Docherty 1993, 4).

### **2.1.1 Domination of Outer Nature, Inner Nature and Others**

It was, however, primarily with the writings of Adorno and Horkheimer that my understanding was furthered and broadened beyond capitalism as the cause of the crisis of nature. This took place as a result of their identification of the inescapable compulsion to the

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Bosquet is the pen name for Andre Gorz an Austrian social philosopher living in France.

social domination of nature as the essential feature of Western reason, as well as with their replacement of the orthodox Marxist emphasis on class struggle as the motor of history with what they perceived as the equally important connection between two aspects of domination: the domination of nature and the domination of “man,” directed at others as well as the self. Domination was recognized by Critical Theory as assuming a range of non-economic guises, including the subjugation of women and cruelty to animals, matters overlooked by most orthodox Marxists (Eckersley 1996, 101). As Horkheimer and Adorno argued, the domination of nature goes together with self-domination and social domination, including the domination of human beings, in a subject/object dialectic. What we have inflicted on nature we have in turn imposed on each other and ourselves, dominating our impulses by way of instinctual renunciation and self-denial. Mastery of inner nature is a logical correlate to the mastery of external nature since “the domination of the world presupposes a condition under which man’s reason is already master in its own house, that is, in the domain of human nature” (Leiss cited in Merchant 1996, 59). Essentially, the first wave of critical theorists argued that the domination of outer nature necessitated a similar domination of inner nature attained by the repression and renunciation of the instinctual, aesthetic and expressive aspects of our being (Eckersley 1992, 102). Gaining control over the natural environment necessitates mechanisms of control over the individual’s wayward impulses, as well as over the general populace, of which the culture industry is, for Horkheimer and Adorno, only the latest representative of social control (McGowan 1991, 18-19). However, the domination of external nature by internal nature extracts a cost: it does not go un-resisted (Merchant 1996, 4). The unrestrained ab/use of external nature destroys its own conditions for continuation, just as the repression of human emotions – the tight rein extended over repressed instinctual demands, including aesthetic and expressive aspects of

our being – leads not to happiness, but to a greater potential for rebellion (Eckersley 1996, 70; Merchant 1996, 4). Termed “the return of the repressed” by Freud and “the revolt of nature” by Horkheimer, in the “totally administered world” of late capitalism the repressed returns in the barbarous and (ir)rational form of fascism, while internal revolt rebels psychically, spiritually, and bodily, with external nature revolting ecologically (Callinicos 1994, 10; Merchant 1996, 4).

### **2.1.2 The Dialectic of Myth and Reason**

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), written with an acute awareness of the material and historical realities of fascism and Nazism, Horkheimer and Adorno set themselves the task of “discovering why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, was sinking into a new kind of barbarism” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, xi). Composed “when the end of the Nazi terror was in sight,” *The Dialectic*, so named in order to emphasize the flux between mimesis and enlightenment, not only proposes that “Enlightenment is totalitarian,” but that “the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant” and is a text that asks for an explanation for “evil in the world” in a supposedly progressive history (Ibid., 3).<sup>7</sup>

Horkheimer and Adorno argued that while the development of instrumental reason promises the subject autonomy from the forces of nature, it acts only to enslave the subject again by its own repression of its impulses and inclinations: its own nature. Not only is nature conquered, but the body is subordinated to the mind, the unconscious repressed (Berman 1981, 132). Horkheimer and Adorno state, “It is not merely that domination is paid for by the alienation of men from the objects dominated: with the objectification of spirit, the very relations of men – even those of the individual to himself – were bewitched” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, 28). The Frankfurt School challenged the hegemony of instrumental rationality, that

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<sup>7</sup> Mimesis as an attempt to become like nature through an identification/imitation of it.

branch of human reason that is concerned with apprehending the instrumental value of phenomena and that is supposed to deliver humankind from want and suffering in its equation of reason, emancipation and progress (Eckersley 1992, 98). Horkheimer and Adorno saw this position as inadequate, failing to acknowledge the other dark side of reason, as well as its limitations (Best and Kellner 1997, 7). Horkheimer and Adorno did not radically separate “ancient” and “modern” as categories; they did not view enlightenment as designating a particular historical period. Their position was not anti-Enlightenment. The focus of *The Dialectic* was the investigation of the self-destruction of the Enlightenment, while always maintaining the dialectical position that *reason might change* (Jarvis 1998, 30; Luke 1988, 77). Their stance was that “the Enlightenment *must consider itself*” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, xv). Their critique of enlightenment was intended to prepare the way for a positive notion of enlightenment in order to release it from entanglement in blind domination (Ibid., xvi).

Horkheimer and Adorno critiqued rationalism, especially the Cartesian version of mathematical reason that dominated as pure calculation holding up reason as the “essential substance” of human life. This reason claimed absolute knowledge of reality, the ability to dispel ambiguity and unclarity, replacing them with the transparency of logic and truth (Best and Kellner 1997, 7; Docherty 1993, 8). Horkheimer and Adorno detail how the Enlightenment, in its drive to this absolute reason, systematically extirpated animism and mythological thinking through a series of related intellectual and practical operations presented as demythologizing, secularizing or disenchanting nature and the world through the progressive applications of reason (Docherty 1993, 5; Jarvis 1998, 22, 24; Luke 1988, 72). While enlightenment is traditionally viewed as the emancipation of man from the despotism of myth, fear and superstition, Horkheimer and Adorno see it as far less straightforward or emancipatory, since enlightenment

can be as totalitarian as any system (Docherty 1993, 5; Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, 24; Lenhardt 1976, 36). They are more inclined to view it dialectically, as emancipating while also mythic in its claims to absolute knowledge. Horkheimer and Adorno elaborate two theses: their double perspective is that myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology, “which it never really knew how to elude” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, xvi, 11-12, 27, 31). For them, reason is actually mythical rather than fully rational because it suppresses rather than reflects on its own relation to myth and tradition. Their analysis of the “dialectic of enlightenment” refers to the ways in which supposedly enlightened rational thought contains traces of myth and irrationality, which in turn contain a rational core. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that as modes of knowing, myth, magic and ritual anticipate scientific domination (Luke 1988, 76).<sup>8</sup> If human reason is a universal characteristic, myth provides explanation and was already characterized by the discipline and power that Bacon celebrated as the “right mark” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, 8).

For Horkheimer and Adorno, reason has been reduced to a specific form of reason, presented as the only valid or legitimate form of rational thinking and reducing material realities into rational concepts, ideally into a form amenable to mathematization (Docherty 1993, 6). Reason becomes no more than the language of logic and mathematics, which translates reality into reason’s own terms, while non-conceptual reality gets lost in the translation, escaping consciousness entirely (Ibid.). A mathematical consciousness thus produces the world, not

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<sup>8</sup> Morris Berman reiterates this thesis in *The Re-enchantment of the World* (1981) claiming that ironically, alchemy and magic were decisive in preparing the ground for the scientific method because they were engaged in rational attempts to control natural processes. Magic and mimesis represent a time of undifferentiated unity where the subject has no identity apart from nature, but not before rationality or domination (Jarvis 1998, 30, 31; Lenhardt 1976, 39). Mythic reasoning is actually an operationalist mode of thinking, mediating people’s fears surrounding self-preservation by efforts to control or influence nature (Luke 1988, 77).

unexpectedly, as mathematics. What concerned Horkheimer and Adorno was that under the “sign of Enlightenment” the subject’s engagement with the world would be “rational” only in the most purely formal sense of the word (Ibid., 8). They were concerned that what should be a political engagement that involves the subject in a process of intellection or critical thinking could be reduced to a ritual of thinking, a formal appearance of thinking that would manifest itself as a legitimization, not of a perception of the world, but of the analytical modes of mathematical reason itself (Ibid.). The disturbance of the subject proposed by an engagement with a materially different Other would be reduced to a confirmation of the aesthetic beauty and the validity of the process of mathematical reason, a process of reason that reduces the subject to an engagement with and a confirmation of its own rational processes (Ibid.). In Horkheimer and Adorno’s words, “Mathematical procedure became, so to speak, the ritual of thinking” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1999, 25).

While critical of instrumental rationality (purposive procedural means and ends that serve the subject’s interest in relation to the assumed reasonableness of self-preservation) Horkheimer and Adorno, in their dialectical way, believed that the reason that dominates as pure calculation is at the same time linked to the possibility of a different and emancipatory reason. Their goal was to rescue and reconcile reason, to bring instrumental “subjective” reason to “objective” or “critical” reason, a reason that engages in critical reflection beyond appearances to a deeper reality concerned with the reasonableness of ends of objective truths. Here “an aim can be reasonable for its own sake ... without reference to some kind of subjective gain or advantage” (Horkheimer 1974, 4). Historically, objective critical reason did not preclude subjective reason, but regarded it “as only a partial, limited expression of a universal rationality” (Ibid.). This state of affairs existed before the “eclipse or crisis of reason” occurred, transfiguring reason into a

subjective faculty of the mind, a notion where the subject alone can genuinely have reason (Ibid., 5, 7). Reason, rather than being “a principle inherent in reality,” a focus on concepts such as the idea of the greater good and the problem of human destiny, at some point becomes the exclusive realization of a purpose (an aim) (Ibid.). Horkheimer and Adorno defended reason from the Romantics (those who reacted against the rigidity of abstract rationalism) and from those who asserted its epistemological supremacy (positivists). Their goal was to foster a mutual critique of these two forms of reason in order to reconcile them, similar to their wish for our “reconciliation” with nature.

### **2.1.3 The Voyage of Odysseus**

There has been an internal, logical connection between aspects of domination throughout their historical development (Leiss 1974, xiv). The classic image of the entanglements of domination, an allegory for the dialectic of enlightenment, is portrayed by Horkheimer and Adorno’s treatment of Homer’s Odysseus, contained in Book XII of the *Odyssey*, which tells of the encounter with the Sirens.<sup>9</sup> The song of the Sirens contained in the *Odyssey* reflects the break between the subject and the object, the song representing the time before differentiation. It holds an irresistible allure, a promise of pleasure, which no one who hears it can escape. The Siren’s song has not yet been rendered powerless by reduction to the condition of art. Odysseus knows of only two ways to save himself and his men, and so he cunningly plugs the ears of his crew with wax to keep them from temptation. The other possibility he reserves for himself; he has himself strapped to the mast so that while he can feel the blind compulsion of nature, he is

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<sup>9</sup> Developments in the West have called forth re-readings of the West’s philosophical tradition, offering a genealogy for current conditions by finding in reason almost from the start the tendencies that have led to the present. (McGowan 1991, 95-96) Adorno and Horkheimer locate the fall in the *Odyssey*, whereas Nietzsche and Heidegger usually reserve this role for Socrates as the villain (Ibid., 96).

bound, unable to yield to self-abandonment and enact his desire. Bound by chains, Odysseus feels the tension between his desire for emancipation from nature and the urge to regress to pre-rational pleasure (Lenhardt 1976, p.44). While his men know only of the song's danger but cannot experience any of its beauty, for Odysseus escape forces an existence separate from nature, grounded in the inescapable compulsion toward the social domination of nature. Odysseus's escape epitomizes the break with the enchanted past of myth and mimesis the struggle in the ancient world to overcome the imitation of nature and immersion in the pleasures of animal life in order to develop a sense of self as distinct from the external natural world (Merchant 1996, 3). Odysseus is able to break the hold of the mythic past and control his animal instincts and thus himself as well as his men, his wife, and other women, but the cost is alienation from his own emotions, bodily pleasures, other human beings, and nature itself (Ibid.).

#### **2.1.4 Closing Statements**

An awareness of the existence of thematic affinities between Critical Theory (in particular the work of Adorno) and poststructural/ postmodern styles of thought has led to it being viewed as a prelude to this theoretical development. Adorno's work has also been claimed as congruent "in its formal structure" with the work of Emmanuel Levinas.<sup>10</sup> Similarities to

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<sup>10</sup> Hent de Vries's *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas* (German original published in 1989 with the English translation published in 2005) claims that the appearance of secularism in philosophy contains an unacknowledged entanglement with religion that he explores through the work of Adorno, Levinas and others. He claims that Adorno's dialectical critique (negative dialects) of dialectics and Levinas's phenomenological (post phenomenological) critique of phenomenology resemble each other formally in their attempt to locate a transcendent dimension that places the subject in demand, or for Levinas obligates the subject. Asher Horowitz also stages a conversation between Levinas and Adorno in his article "'By a hair's breadth' Critique, transcendence and the ethical in Adorno and Levinas" published in 2002. For Horowitz the similarities between Levinas and Adorno seem to consist in their search for the ethical and their difficulty (possibly the impossibility) of having



Levinas stem from Adorno's critique of the epistemological tendency toward identity (what something is) and totality in its affinity with domination, and his negative dialectics as a critique of identity thinking demonstrating the non-identity of the subject and the object, the universal and the particular, pursued by him as a way of endowing the thinking mind with a dimension of radical otherness. Adorno's thinking was imbued with the quest for a non-dominating form of cognition according to which the repressed other, the non-identical, the singular as pure alterity can be thought. His writings express guilt with respect to the harm that has been done to the non-identical and contains an ethical dimension according to which the other can be thought non-violently. While questions of reason and rationality pervade Adorno's thought, it is the status of concepts and conceptuality that is the principle object of analysis of his main works. For Adorno, an expanded and changed concept of reason means expanding the scope and character of cognition, of knowing. His ethics is derived from the notion of conceptual thinking itself, ethics pursued through hyper-cognitive means.

While the major concepts (ethics) and arguments that Adorno (identity/negative dialectics) and Levinas (totality/post-phenomenology) examine and critique may be similar, the difficulty in claiming Adorno as more than a prelude for poststructuralism/postmodernism as well as for Levinasian thought is that the differences that distinguish them are more pervasive than their similarities. While the non-identical figured prominently in Adorno's thinking, his search for ethics *in* cognition differs radically from Levinas's critique wherein cognition reduces and assimilates alterity to the same. Levinas's phenomenological ethical event is presented as a pre-cognitive experience, existing "before" we think or are consciously aware. Preservation of Marxist terminology as well as the retention of the concepts of ideology, reification, use-value

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access to an outside point from which to speak. For both authors the affiliations appear to be at the highest level of abstraction.

and truth, distinguishes Critical Theory's perspective from that of poststructuralism/postmodernism as well as Levinas's project. The Frankfurt School critique of the limits of Enlightenment reason, the logic of identity and totality remained for them a dialectical (even though negative) and immanent critique rather than one invested in transcendence (yet there was always a search/desire/need to escape metaphysics and find a transcendent outside. Adorno's attempt at transcendence resulted in the move to negative dialectics). The lack of similarity between the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School principals and Levinas the phenomenologist can also be seen from the lack of mutual recognition and acknowledgement they gave each other even though they were contemporaries (Adorno, 1903-1969; Horkheimer 1895-1973; Marcuse 1898-1979; Levinas 1906-1995).

Congruence between some of the theorists of the Frankfurt School and Levinas emerges from the fact that their work is in many ways a response to the Shoah. It is in their experience of being the Jewish Other during Nazi fascism's rise to power that is contained a mutual biographical component addressed in their theoretical writings. For Critical Theory this emerged with the principle of the non-identical as a way to end the domination, assimilation, exclusion and annihilation of the other. It is here that they meet in their search for the primacy of ethics over epistemology and ontology.

## **Section III    ETHICS RATHER THAN RELATIVISM**

### **3.0    Transformations**

The world has shifted, whether or not we appreciate or approve of its mutations (Dear 1997, 67).

All twentieth-century philosophy, aside from positivism, rejects the hegemony of science. This is the very contemporaneity of contemporary thought and the deepest sense of its “postmodernity” (Cohen 2001, 3).

There seem to be some important new developments in the world that deserve consideration and articulation. These events and reformulations have affected all academic disciplinary fields, areas of culture and thought, as well as economic and political conditions. The new social movements that have emerged, including the environmental movement, distinguish themselves from a class-based analysis, described by Marxists as the restructuring of national to transnational capitalist economies (Best and Kellner 1997, 30). Sociologically, the situation has been described as the transformation from industrialism to a postindustrial society in which informationalism is the technological basis of economic activity and social organization (Castells 2000, 5). It has also been formulated as a decomposition in the idea of the totality of society, a shift from a concern with the study of social systems to a study of sociological actors in the context of culturalism. Political economists have depicted the shift as a means of forestalling crisis using the language of the French regulation theorists. In the new post-Fordist society, the modern Fordist form of capitalist society marked by mass production and consumption, state regulation of the economy, and a homogenous mass culture has been replaced by more flexible modes of sociopolitical and economic regulation.<sup>11</sup> The most important factors in creating the shifts and changes in the

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<sup>11</sup> Regulation theory has theorized the nature of the current globalization of multinational capital in a restructuring world order as the ability of capitalism to be consistently adaptable in forestalling crisis. The demise of the Fordist post-World War II social compromise has given way to the emergence of new social modes of economic regulation (Peck and Tickell 1994, 285). These modes of regulation are generated in, and function through, social norms and habits,

present moment are the experiences and effects of new technologies, intimately bound up with globalization and the vicissitudes of transnational capitalism (Best and Kellner 1997, 13). These factors are also part of the source of the global social and environmental crisis. In examining the turn in theory that has occurred, I do not want to leave unacknowledged the fact that intellectual shifts must be contextualized as part of the broader social patterns and movements in society and history that influence changes in culture and thought; I also want to avoid a reductive determinism that reduces ideas to economic or technological forces (Ibid., xi, xii).

### **3.0.1 The Turn in Politics**

The political turn in question began to recognize that domination was not going to be overturned by changes in state power or economic relations (congruent with the opinions of Critical Theory). It came to be recognized that a critique of social injustice from the standpoint of an orthodox Marxist class analysis was limited. The recognition arose that a multitude of forms of power and domination existed not only in the realm of labour but in all our institutions, our culture and our everyday life (Ibid., 10). The theme of the exploitation of labour and class solidarity shifted to the new social movements including feminism, gay rights, various struggles

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customs and networks, moral codes, political and sociocultural institutions and practices, and reflect compromises representing a set of codified social relations which act to ensure and sustain the accumulation process on behalf of a regime of accumulation (Peck and Tickell 1994, 284; Painter 1995, 277-278). When these mechanisms come together in particular combinations, a social regulation is said to be operative, holding back crisis tendencies endemic to capitalism, and thereby keeping the system operative (Lauria 1997, 6, 209). The rise of new reconfigurations has been instrumental as an explanatory tool illustrative of an emerging order based on flexibility, structural competitiveness and supply-side regulation. Regulation theory has also theorized a changing state inclined towards the conflictual and contradictory character of the state, allowing politics to engage the state (albeit a radically different polity) as a possible ally with regard to progressive agendas. The emerging post-Fordist state is a reconfigured site of local negotiation and bargaining.

around race and ethnicity as well as the environmental movement, distinguishing themselves from a class-based analysis and politics (Ibid.).

French radical intellectuals, activists, and theorists gave up the idea that social transformation would emerge from mass struggle and revolutionary upheaval contained in many Marxist critiques of capitalism (Louis Althusser's version of scientific structuralist Marxism dominated the political discourse of the time), postulating instead that it would emerge through developments in the economy, technology, culture and society (Ibid., 5).<sup>12</sup> Marxist structuralism began to be perceived as totalizing and reductive; its visions of revolution and emancipation began to be rejected as totalizing and ineffective. This reorientation was due in large part to the failures of 1960s radicalism, the reality of Stalinism and the betrayal of the Communist Party in France in 1968. Rather than support students and workers who stood on the verge of overthrowing the state, support was provided for de Gaulle's call for a return to normalcy, a conformist position that facilitated the return of the president to power and restored the status quo, crushing all hope and deeply disappointing those who had expectations for the triumph of revolution (Best and Kellner 1997, 5; Cahoon 2003, 4). In short, after the revolution in Paris failed in May, 1968, how does one then proceed to ground an emancipatory politics (Docherty 1993, 35)? Reacting to the communist accommodation following the political upheaval, numerous French radicals came to associate Marxism with communist bureaucracy (Best and Kellner 1997, 5). Stalinism came to be viewed as a totalitarian failure of Marxism, leading to a

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that feminism and the social struggles of the civil rights movement contributed to the epistemological reformulations that the poststructural/postmodern shift in theory is about. Feminists began to question the category "woma/en" as a homogeneous totality while tensions in the civil rights struggle similarly began to pull at the construction of the whole. Tensions surrounding racism, sexism, classism and homophobia in the various social struggles began to call the categorizations themselves into question making it quite apparent that neither uniformity nor a singular "truth" was a part of any struggle. One of the texts that captured these rearticulations well for me was *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) edited by Cherrie Morgan and Gloria Anzaldúa.

search for new theories and politics. The disappointment and loss of hope in Marxism led to references about poststructuralism, in its French origins, as “the abandonment of Marxism by the disillusioned children of 1968” and “the wayward child of Marxism, a generation’s sense that it is orphaned” (Best and Kellner 1997, 5; Cahoon 2003, 5).

### **3.0.2 The Turn in Theory**

Structuralism as a method of analysis was originally developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and was published posthumously in 1916 as *Course in General Linguistics* by his students from their notes. Saussure’s contention was that language is a self-sufficient system of signs (not related to outside objects or ideas) where difference makes identity possible as differential relations among terms (i.e., the production of meaning is created inside language in the difference between words). From its beginnings as an analysis of the formal invariant properties of language, it was broadened in the mid-twentieth century by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and others, who propelled it into various disciplinary fields where its insights were developed. That development has translated out to mean that the human activities of perception, meaning and thought are not natural but constructed.

Structuralism centred on the underlying deep universal patterns and structures of the human mind and the way in which it classifies things in the social world. The key to understanding human existence for structuralism is to be found in the study of abstract relations within systems (Cahoon 2003, 4). As such, it advocated a scientifically objective and comprehensive theoretical focus on structures that make the individual, or rather the subject, what he or she is. It rejected Enlightenment humanism and existentialism with their emphasis on individual human consciousness and choice, in favour of a portrayal of the self as a construct of systems. It

maintains the primacy of wholes over parts, privileging abstract social structures, patterns and institutions over individual agency and responsibility (Best and Kellner 1997, 33; Jay 1984, 388, 389). An adherence to universal timeless structures cancels out history. Unlike a humanist rendering that would depict the author as the creator/originator of the text, structuralism views the author as inhabiting pre-existing structures of language, originality misperceived as recombination. Structuralism has been described as, “Thought without thinkers” as it tends to dispense with the individual altogether (Auzias cited in Kurzweil 1980, 228-229).

The original proponents of the shift away from a structuralist (language) orientation were schooled in the theoretical movement of structuralism, developing poststructuralism (discourse) both as an extension and a putting-into-question of the premises and limitations of structuralism. It was a move away from its attempt at the realization of a totality, fixed or closed signification, rigid schemes as well as scientific and objective claims (to origins), yet it maintained the view of the structuralist subject as “an outdated humanist illusion” (Davis 1996, 2). The concept of the individual developed in the Renaissance as a unified, rational, autonomous and self-transparent agent of history was abandoned, regarded as “possibly no more than an effect of language,” culturally and discursively created. Disruptions in the concept of structure as a stable system found texts to have not one but several contradictory signifying systems. While the structuralist project studied underlying structures in their search for the truth “behind” or “within” a text, poststructuralists considered the underlying structures themselves as culturally constructed requiring an analysis and study of systems of knowledge in order to understand how knowledge (i.e., truth) itself is produced historically. Thus truth loses its finality, poststructuralism stressing the fragmentary, heterogeneous and plural character of reality, denying human thought the ability to arrive at any objective account of that reality (Callinicos 1994, 2). This reorientation provides

for a wider range of options in the possibility of multiple meanings and narratives. If one had to find a common denominator among figures in the poststructuralist category it would have to be their rejection of totalizing (a single explanatory concept), essentialist (a reality that exists independent of, beneath or beyond language and ideology) and foundationalist concepts (signifying systems are stable and unproblematic representations). These rejections have led to a certain crisis in theory delineated more fully below.

### **3.0.3 The Seeming Crisis**

It was primarily Jean-Francois Lyotard who, with his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979, not translated into English till 1984) who pursued the poststructuralist argument and analysed knowledge in terms of narratives of how we understand the world, providing a certain definitive status in discussions of the postmodern (Bertens 1995, 112; Malpas, 2005, 36). For Lyotard, the term “modern” involved “any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative,” examples of which would be master narratives of progress, socialism or knowledge. The postmodern, by contrast, was defined as an incredulity toward “metanarratives” (subscription to a prevailing theory against whose norms single events of judging might themselves be judged and validated), the collapse of the “grand narrative” (Callinicos 1994, 3, 9). The term “postmodern” itself has been described as usually pertaining to “poststructuralism” as it was poststructuralists who radicalized the critique of modern philosophy and became labelled as postmodern theorists (Cahoone 2003, 1). The metanarratives or grand narratives which were the supposedly transcendent and universal truths that underpinned Western civilization and that functioned to give that civilization objective legitimation have been thrown into doubt,



engendering what has been referred to as a “crisis of legitimation” (Bertens 1995, 124). The increasing popularity of the term “narrative” itself reflects the epistemological crisis of contemporary culture, “narrative” being what is left when belief in an absolute possibility of knowledge is eroded. It has become increasingly difficult to subscribe to the great and totalizing metanarratives that once organized our lives.

The accomplishment of the Scientific Revolution, the reliance upon a stable relationship between the subject and the object that was the cornerstone of Rene Descartes’s definition of knowledge, has come into crisis. The conceptualization of the truth as a coherent system of representation that corresponds to things as they are apart from consciousness, has been shaken. Truth is now just as likely to be the condition that I have achieved when my interpretation of reality makes sense to me, and is more of a coherence disguised as correspondence, i.e., representation. The notion of correspondence as an accurate representation of reality has been challenged as a generalized critique of the entire metaphysical enterprise. Truth claims have become particularized, denying the claim of any fixed and transcendental origin of knowledge. Knowledge is no longer thought of as an absolute permanent ontological reality passively received. Meaning and intellectual categories are now slippery, shifting and in flux. Meaning is unsettled, no longer reducible to structures of difference. Such structures of differential relations between terms require clear identifiable categories in order to be grasped by knowledge. While difference makes knowledge possible it is ungraspable using only the categories of knowledge; difference does not lend itself to identity. Under pressure is our ability to convey reality, which has relied on truth, including a correspondence between the subject and the object. The “real” can no longer be depended upon as the basis of a stable epistemology.

Even the solidity of scientific knowledge has begun to experience scepticism in regard to its ability to grasp the object, causing science to give way to a form of narrative knowledge (Docherty 1993, 25). The frequently heard phrase “the narratives of science,” popular in the new field of science studies, carries the implication that scientific discourse does not reflect as covertly construct reality, does not discover truths but fabricates them in a process disturbingly comparable to the overt working of narrative fiction. Scientific knowledge itself, in its previous grounding in the totality of a governing theory, has come under suspicion, characterized by this incredulity toward metanarratives (Ibid., 25). Similarly, our authoritative epistemological grasp of nature as the real has been loosened. The generalized turn in theory has challenged the presumption that nature exists independent of culture to the point where nature, like the human subject, has become an artefact of language, a social construct, a fiction. The subject/object distinction, the idea of the human subject perceiving the natural world and coming to certain knowledge of it has similarly been put into question.

We are left with a problematic as to what can serve as a rational basis for choices that will ensure responsible behaviour in an atmosphere no longer able to rely on religious dogma or universal narrative truths, a time devoid of religious and philosophical certitude (Leiss 1974, 196; McGowan 1991, 13). It has become increasingly difficult in a heterogeneous society, which tacitly embraces the notion of social relativity, to articulate an absolute conception of proper behaviour: there seems to be no external authority to which we can look for advice (Evernden 1992, 6). In a world without the grounds or foundations for judgments, a world that is resolutely anti-foundationalist and anti-universalist – eschewing all appeals to ontological, epistemological or ethical absolutes – where does the basis for an ethical response lie (McGowan 1991, ix)? Where is the source of the compelling power of the ethical to be found (Casey 2003, 191)? The

importance of looking at this issue stems from the fact that we exist in an era where coming to terms with ethical judgments is without recourse to comforting principles that help to simplify difficult choices (Davis 1996, 53). Is it possible to have an ethics without foundations, without imperatives or any claim to universality or truth (Ibid., 3)?

### **3.0.4 The Ethical Turn**

It is with the crisis in epistemology brought about by the end of metaphysics and the loss of the moral agency of the subject understood as sovereign rational autonomy that poststructural/postmodern theory has been subject to accusations of nihilism, amorality, relativism, irrationalism and an incompatibility with ethical concerns. Perhaps as a response to these charges, French poststructural thought from the late 1970s in Europe (the mid-1980s in the United States) took a decidedly ethical turn. Its concern with/for the Other has been described as one of the hallmarks of poststructuralism (Davis 1996, 2, 124, 155; Critchley 2002, 2). A long series of books by some of the most prominent poststructural thinkers directly confronted ethical issues and, either implicitly or explicitly, it was Emmanuel Levinas's account of alterity that became an almost obligatory point of reference, with ethics understood as the "questioning of the self as it encounters the irreducible Other" (Davis 1996, 125).

It is in the philosophical work of Emmanuel Levinas, in his analysis and concept of the ethical, born out of his experience of the Shoah, that represents the best example of an attempt to think through the ethical consequences of our time (Ibid., 53). Levinas's relevance in a world without essences, foundations, or universality, is congruent with his refusal to totalize yet not to abandon the ethical. In fact, Levinas does not see the end of metaphysics as an irredeemable crisis, but as an "opportunity for Western philosophy to open itself to the dimension of otherness

and transcendence beyond being” (Cohen 1986, 33). Levinas abandons definitions of ethics as moral codes and principles based on rationality and universality, but not ethics, which, is understood by him as a relation of infinite responsibility to the Other. The significance of Levinas lies in his long-standing inquiry into ethical questions concerned with what it means to talk of justice or responsibility where our belief systems, either religious or scientifically rational, are in a state of collapse (Davis 1996, ix, 3). Levinas does not provide foundations or rules for morality, nor does he discuss virtue, or rights and duties (Ibid., 47). For Levinas, the ethical is the broader domain, where ethical experiences and relationships occur *before* the foundation of ethics in the sense of established principles, rules or codes (Ibid., 48). To reduce the other, who calls me as a unique self in the face-to-face encounter, to a set of moral principles is a violence to the alterity of the Other. Ethics for Levinas is *lived* in the sensibility of an embodied exposure to the other (Critchley 2002, 21) Ethics, in the Levinasian sense, does not provide a path to knowledge of right and wrong, good or evil (Davis 1996, 143). The contemporary importance of Levinas’s ethics derives from the crucial role it accords to the problem of otherness, which ensures that his reflections have resonance in areas beyond his own circle of interest.

## Section IV

### IN AND BEYOND DISCOURSE

#### 4.0 Levinas's Ethics Of The Other

Ethics in Anglo-American philosophy deals with the means of structuring the interactions of atomistic individuals. It is almost another technical fix, a cultural corrective to a congenital deformity (Evernden 1986, 69, 137).

Levinas survived the Second World War as the other. He was a French prisoner of war in a German internment camp, thinking through an extreme ethics suited to the extreme circumstances in which it was thought through (Llewelyn 1991, 39; Parker 1989, 1). Levinas's hope for ethics beyond knowledge and history, his insistence that our obligation to the other as non-reciprocal, and, in some sense, greater than the other's obligation to us, emanates from what it meant in Nazi-dominated Europe to side with, shelter, or protect those condemned, to stand against the regime of evil, even if it meant torture and death for oneself, one's family, friends and village (Gottlieb 1994, 233). To be responsible, as many were, was to reach out to those who could not reach back to you (Ibid.). This is the meaning of the non-reciprocal for Levinas. The Holocaust and his encounter with totalitarianism marked his work and is a response to the "traumas experienced by the subject" in our time, as mass industrialized murder cannot be dismissed as an aberration of the 1940s, but is the defining characteristic of the twentieth century (Gottlieb 1994, 135; Davis 1996, 84). Levinas has described his life as "dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror" and has dedicated *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* "To the memory of those who were ... assassinated by the National Socialists, and to [all the other] victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism" (Levinas 1981, dedication page). The Shoah is not the only barbarism to have characterized the century. As Levinas states it is:

A century which in thirty years has known two world wars, totalitarianisms of the left and right. Hiroshima, the gulags, the genocides of Auschwitz and Cambodia. A century which is drawing to an end with the sceptre of the return of all that these barbaric names evoke. Suffering and evil imposed deliberately, but which no reason could limit in the exasperation of reason which has become political and detached from all ethics (cited in Davis 1996, 143).

#### **4.0.1 The Phenomenology of Husserl**

It was Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who saw the crisis of European man as “the seeming collapse of rationalism,” setting himself the objective of “saving human reason” (Stumpf 1979, 375). His development of the phenomenological method launched with *Logical Investigations* (1900-01) was a move away from a naturalistic conception of the world (subject/object) as a way of knowing, and in its stead Husserl proposed that rationality include value and meaning reflective of the world as we experience it. For Husserl, the goal was to understand how we ordinarily pre-theoretically experience by *describing* its historical emergence from an origin or event. The phenomenological method discloses the structure of conscious experience, the way phenomena appear in consciousness by means of intention and reduction, or *epoche* (from the Greek abstaining from belief). The reduction to *epoche* as a refusal of judgement, a “bracketing” that declines assumptions about the natural world is a process where intentionality “constitutes” the objects of cognition. Phenomenology has been described as, “the broadest, deepest, most flexible conception of science ever to be conceived” (Cohen 2001, 12). It expresses a notion that challenges us to see how a shift in emphasis from “symbolic” or “objectifying” functions and the usual array of conditioned responses (perceiving, observing), to experiencing the world can provide us with a way of accessing the world that might alter our expectations and behaviour towards the world at large (Evernden 1986, 43; Livingston 1983, 66).

In spite of the fact that Husserl, a defender of science, set out to provide a secure foundation to scientific knowledge, his major achievement for Levinas lies in the liberation of philosophy from the “stranglehold of naturalist epistemology” (Davis 1996, 11). This liberation is achieved by Husserl’s rethinking of the phenomenon whereby phenomenology provides a method for investigating the experience of the world freed from the scientific search for objective essences hidden behind phenomenal existence (Ibid., 11, 12). Scientific objectivity accepts an unquestioned ontology in its quest for secure knowledge; it relies on a pursuit of a stable essence hidden behind the flux of perceived phenomena (Ibid., 11). Husserl erases this implicit separation of essence and phenomenon (Ibid., 11-12). Unlike theories of knowledge such as that of Descartes, which distinguish between a knowing mind, on the one hand, the object of knowledge on the other, Husserl rejects the dualism seeing virtually no distinction between consciousness and the phenomena. His unique point is that phenomena – *whatever is* – are ultimately contained in the very subjective act whereby what is, is present to consciousness. For Husserl it is consciousness of an object and not the essences of objects that defines Being. This attitude is contrary to naturalism, which assumes an objective physical world independently existing (Ibid.). Phenomenology is not the study of phenomena as distinct from these essences; in phenomenology, phenomena are the available mode of presentation of essences (Ibid., 12). Phenomenology thus surpasses naturalist epistemology in its establishment of two new areas of investigation: studying existence in all its multiplicity, not simply as unchanging essences, but as well, exploring the meaning of the existence of objects, not in a theological sense, but in a secular way, as meaning is conferred on the world by the intentional acts/processes of consciousness (noesis), and also as the intentional objects give meaning to those acts and are constituted by consciousness (noema) (Davis 1996, 12; Critchley 1999, 4). For Levinas, Husserl

surpasses naturalist epistemology by rethinking the fundamental distinction inaugurated by Descartes between subject and object (Davis 1996, 12).

Husserlian phenomenology occupies a central place in the development of philosophy, retaining a privileged position in the writings of Levinas with his development of the phenomenological approach. But it is Levinas's dissatisfaction with phenomenology that marks the most important phase of his philosophical career developing into a critical rereading of the history of Western philosophy and civilization in general, as a failure to think of the Other as Other, seeking to appropriate and assimilate the Other, to neutralize the threat it poses to the autonomy and sovereignty of the same (Ibid., 8, 32, 33, 142).

#### **4.0.2 Beyond Husserl and Heidegger**

Similarly, while the work of Heidegger appeared to Levinas as a crucial but dangerous stage in modern philosophy; it is in order to escape the limitations of Heidegger's thought that Levinas entails thinking through and beyond him, rather than returning to the comforts of "pre-Heideggerian naivety" (Davis 1996, 9; Critchley 2002, 10). Levinas had difficulty separating Heidegger's later philosophy from his involvement with National Socialism, his membership in the Nazi party, and his acceptance of the position of Rector of Freiburg University in 1933, where he delivered his inaugural address endorsing the Nazi program (Critchley 2002, 8; Zimmerman 1994, 114). If Levinas's life was dominated by the Nazi horror, his philosophical life was animated by the question of how someone as brilliant as Heidegger could have become a Nazi (Critchley 2002, 8)? Levinas could not forgive Heidegger's lack of public expressions of regret for that support and for the victims of Nazism (Zimmerman 1994, 114). Levinas consequently developed a post-phenomenological ethics in opposition to the phenomenology not



only of Husserl but also of Heidegger, leading to his work being described as “postmodern, post-phenomenological and post-Heideggerian” (Davis 1996, 8). He has been referred to as “genuinely” postmodern because he challenges the hegemony of epistemology (Cohen 2001, 5). Levinas insisted that phenomenology is a method, which one must pass through toward any thinking beyond what has been described as the ethical impasse of phenomenology (Davis 1996, 33).

Levinas considered the principle and abiding contribution of the phenomenological method to be its heightened reflexivity towards its own status, “a radical, obstinate reflection about itself” (cited in Davis 1996, 9). At the same time he criticized Husserl’s intellectualism, in which consciousness is the starting point of meaning; contemplatively standing outside time and the historical experiences it observes (Cohen 2001, 8; Davis 1996, 13). Levinas was also critical of Husserl’s lack of intersubjectivity, whereby the *epoche*, which reveals the transcendental Ego, is outside the world, unable on its own to demonstrate the existence of other minds (Davis 1996, 13). These criticisms derive from the fact that Levinas is reading Husserl “through the powerful lens of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*” (Ibid.). Levinas sees Heidegger crucially modifying the phenomenological project by stressing the ontological dimension of phenomenology, already found in Husserl’s work, giving it an ontological turn as he accords it a privileged role in his project to describe Being (Ibid., 14). For Levinas, the importance of Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology lies in dislodging the absolute primacy accorded by Husserl to consciousness: Heidegger “knocks consciousness off its pedestal” (Ibid., 15, 16). Heidegger’s project does not assume a merely intellectual attitude, but a rich variety of intentional life – emotional, practical and theoretical – through which we relate to others (Peperzak, Critchley, Bernasconi 1996, 1; Critchley 2002, 9). Heidegger’s *Dasein* literally means “there being” and

highlights the central Heideggerian notion that human existence is always in-the-world (Levinas 1997a, 40).<sup>13</sup> For Levinas the ethical subject is an embodied being of flesh and blood, a being capable of hunger as well as enjoying the food eaten (Levinas 1981, 74; Critchley 2002, 22). Levinas complains that Heidegger's *Dasein* is never hungry, nor are all the various heirs to the *res cogitantes*. As Levinas stated, "The need for food does not have existence as its goal, but food" (Levinas 1969, 134). Levinas maintains that only a being that can know what it means to give its bread from out of its own mouth can be for the other (Levinas 1969, 134; Levinas 1981, 74, 142). "It is not a gift of the heart, but of the bread from one's mouth, of one's own mouthful of bread" (Levinas 1981, 74). Levinasian ethics is rooted in the face-to-face bonds of everyday sociality, implying a worldly rather than a spiritual transcendental realm (Gardiner 1996, 132). To give the bread from one's own mouth implies a body. Levinas is therefore able to crucially modify the understanding of intentionality in phenomenology where an entity counts only on the basis of appearing and knowing (Levinas 1981, 80). In moving beyond Husserl, Levinas emphasizes that, in the ethical relation to alterity, intentionality is forced to encounter the world as enigmatic, and opaque, never completely known; consciousness is thus interrupted in its self-contented possession of itself and what lies outside (Davis 1996, 21). It is no longer consciousness of "something" as it is for Husserl, but "an exit from oneself" with alterity, as it is for Levinas.

For Levinas, Heidegger's thought becomes not only a means of moving beyond Husserl, but Heidegger is a figure to be moved beyond as well. In Levinas's interpretation of Heidegger, the fundamental encounter for humans is not with other beings, but with Being itself (Ibid., 23).

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<sup>13</sup> Heidegger also sought to overcome the primacy that had been attached to epistemology as a theory of knowledge (Bernasconi 2006, 22). When Immanuel Kant said that it was scandalous that there was no proof for the existence of the external world, Heidegger's response was that the world was not external and that the real scandal was that such a proof was sought (Ibid., 22-23).

For Levinas, Heidegger's theoretical shortcoming is thus identical to Husserl's, in that he subsumes the Other under the authority of the same, an object of the self (Ibid., 21). Levinas consequently described Heidegger's work as "a tragic testimony to an age and a world which may need to be surpassed," suggesting that Heidegger's ontology is in some ways "strictly classical" (Ibid., 16, 17). In intellectual terms, Levinas's desire to escape the climate of Heidegger's thought entails the rejection of a philosophical style and the world-view inherent in it, a move towards alterity rather than a realization of totality, a liberation from unity and sameness rather than a yearning for complete comprehension (Cohen 1997, vii, 2; Davis 1996, 18).

For Levinas, the Heideggerian ontological relationship, even though it exceeds intellectualism, nonetheless reduces alterity to the same, because the particular is always understood with reference to the universal, and because the Other is always encountered in the intimacy of Being, maintaining the priority of Being over otherness in *Mitsein* (together being, as the absorption of the Other) rather than from outside, a position from which the Other would challenge the sovereignty of my comprehension of the world (Davis 1996, 30, 48, 65; Peperzak, Critchley, Bernasconi 1996, 1). Levinas's one simple but far-reaching idea is that Western philosophy and civilization has consistently practiced a suppression of the Other, a primacy of the self/same over the Other which takes place because speculative thought can only conceive of the other within the I's epistemological horizon: it always reduces alterity to the measure of the same (Davis 1996, ix; Docherty 1993, 26). Levinas questions whether the relation of man to Being is uniquely ontological, whether ontology exhausts the possibilities of a relationship with Being or, whether there is something which exceeds ontology, which may be even more fundamental (Davis 1996, 16, 17; Peperzak, Critchley, Bernasconi 1996, 1)? He asks, "How ...

can the relation with being be, from the outset, anything other than its comprehension as being?” (Levinas 1996a, 6) His response is that it cannot, “Unless it is the Other” (Ibid.). “Our relation with the other certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension” (Ibid.). Heidegger’s question of Being is not the question of the Other, yet for Levinas it is the event of being in relation with the other that Levinas calls ethical, which replaces Heidegger’s establishment of ontology as the proper domain of phenomenology (Peperzak, Critchley, Bernasconi 1996, 2). The ethical face-to-face encounter of the self and Other cuts across ontology radically and irreducibly: it is otherwise, or *beyond being* (Levinas 1982, 9). The face of the other deposes Being, a move from Being to Being’s other, or *Otherwise than Being*. For Levinas, “to be” is not enough; “to be or not to be” is not the question (Levinas 1981, 3). In his view, ethics occurs prior to essence and being and conditions them; the ethical event occurs prior to how we construct it (Cohen 1985, 9).

#### **4.0.3 Encountering the Other**

While knowledge *knows*, it cannot rank importance. In defending ethics *ethically*, insisting on an excellence rather than yet another truth or untruth, Levinas surpasses the entire enterprise of philosophy hitherto conceived (Cohen 2001, 5-6).

Levinas conceives the Infinite or God (transcendence, infinity) as the Other human. Through the ethical encounter with the face of the Other human the idea of the Infinite, God or transcendence can be encountered. In other words, the trace of God is in the face of the Other. For Levinas, the relationship with the other is irreducible to comprehension, knowledge or thematization, precisely because it is a relationship with the Other, with the unknowable absolute other (the transcendent) not dependent on a relation with me. Mere externality would lead to domination and assimilation or same making (Levinas 1996a, 5). Levinas takes the idea of the “Infinite”

from Descartes as a thought that thinks “more than it can think,” a thought that cannot contain the Infinite (Levinas 1969, 49; Levinas 1981, 146). For Levinas, this marks an instance in Western philosophy where the trace of the ethical breaks through the ontological in the inability of cognition to reduce the other to the same as a relationship with transcendence, the Other overflowing the thought that thinks it. To preserve the Other as Other, it must not become an object of knowledge or experience, because knowledge and experience are always *my* knowledge and experience; encountering the other in these ways diminishes its alterity (Davis 1996, 41). Recognition, knowledge, representation, adequation, understanding or empathizing never encounters anything truly other in the world as intelligibility makes everything come from me (Levinas, 1997, 68). It is Levinas’s contention that Western civilization shows a horrific propensity to reduce everything that is fortuitous, foreign and enigmatic to conditions of transparent intelligibility, recoiling from anything that cannot be rationally ordered and manipulated (Hutchens 2004, 14). This has led to an overemphasis on unity and totality and an engagement in a pursuit of objective and certain knowledge of this totality (Gardiner 1996, 129). For Levinas, the problem of the Other has been misposed historically, rather than seeking even more knowledge of it (thus reducing its otherness) we should accept that we do not, cannot, and should not know the Other (Davis 1996, 33). For Levinas the other is primarily that which defies knowledge, and every attempt to thematize and thus capture and grasp that alterity as a concept. The Levinasian “pre-original relationship” is precognitive; it cannot have the same structure as knowledge, as it is not a reflection upon the other, but an active engagement in a noncomprehensive, nonsubsumptive relation to alterity, a focus on the singular individual in front of me, foregoing the mediation of the universal (Levinas 1982, 60; Critchley 2002, 12; Peperzak, Critchley, Bernasconi 1996, 2). The pre-original relationship is not “more originary

than the origin” but it refers to an “irrecuperable pre-ontological past” that “cannot be subordinated to the vicissitudes of representation and knowledge...or an exchange of information” (Levinas 1981, 78-79). For Levinas, the other does not belong to the sphere of intelligibility, but stands in proximity (Ibid., 25). Proximity, unlike cognition, can better approach an entirely other, as alterity is imposed quite differently than the reality of the real (Levinas 1981, 18; Horowitz 2000, 304).

#### **4.0.4 Subjectivity**

It is an assignation to answer without evasions, which assigns the self to be a self (Levinas 1981, 106).

The word “I” means to be answerable for everything and for everyone ... The self bears the weight of the world; it is responsible for everyone (Levinas 1996d, 90).

Levinas acknowledges that Western philosophical thought has been dominated by the reduction of subjectivity to consciousness, a critique rendered against the Enlightenment model of autonomy (egocentric subjectivity) that is reductive of the other (Levinas 1981, 103).<sup>14</sup> Ethics (understood as responsibility) redefines subjectivity from autonomous freedom (self-preservation preserved when subjects are free, equal and relate reciprocally) to a responsibility for the other (when I substitute myself for the other). For Levinas, the ego in consciousness reflecting on itself “escapes its own critical eye” and thus is always limited (Ibid., 92, 102). Similarly, the voyage of Odysseus for Levinas represents the fact that Western philosophy while it may leave the self, always returns home, back to itself (a reduction of the other to the same/self). For Levinas, consciousness, knowing oneself by oneself, is not all there is to the notion of subjectivity. Consciousness does not exhaust the notion of subjectivity even though they have long been

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<sup>14</sup>For Levinas, autonomy as freedom is preceded by the primordial call of the other.

treated as equivalent concepts (Levinas 1981, 102; Levinas 1996d, 82-82). “The oneself has not issued from its own initiative” as it is responsibility, a relationship with the other, with alterity itself that is constitutive of subjectivity (Levinas 1981, 105; Lingis 1978, xiii). Responsibility to the Other constitutes a true subject as “It is as responsible that one is incarnated” (Levinas 1981, 105). Subjectivity is responsibility for-the-other, not a feature or an attribute of subjectivity. Levinas provides a description of the context in which the stakes of ethics are established, a context crucially defined not only by the presence of the Other but by “finding oneself addressed” and “appealed to” (Ibid., xxii). His departure resides in the claim that ethics begins not with the claim of myself as an autonomous being, but with a sense of myself and an obligation as in relation to an Other, a being who is not myself (the “same”) and who sets limits, and puts into critical question my capacity for free action (Matthews 1996, 160). In the words of Levinas,

A calling into question of the Same – which cannot occur within the egoistic spontaneity of the Same – is brought about by the Other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics (Levinas 1969, 33, 43).

For Levinas, subjectivity is “the restlessness of the same disturbed by the other” or, it can be seen as alterity escaping the cognitive powers of the knowing subject (Critchley 2002, 5; Levinas 1981, 25). The ethical is therefore a location of alterity or “exteriority” that defies and cannot be reduced to the same.

The event of the subject’s exposure to the Other does not occur as an event within the experience of the subject; it is an interruption, a breaking out. It is the pre-original event of subjectivity, the founding condition of subjectivity, not an aspect of it (Davis 1996, 79-80). The very nature of its existence is in proximity to the Other, approaching the Other in the “risky

uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability” (Levinas 1981, 48). The subject is possible only with its recognition and response to the Other, a recognition that carries responsibility, a response toward not what is different (difference manifests itself in the ontological realm), but what is irreducibly other (as independent from me). It is not that responsibility cannot be declined; whether I choose to respond does not alter the fact that I am called to respond. I am free to decline; to decline is *still* to respond, the appeal cannot be ignored as I have no choice in the matter. The “impossibility of declining responsibility is reflected only in the scruple or remorse which precedes or follows this refusal” (Ibid., 6-7). It is in the encounter with the alterity of the Other that I am radically challenged throwing my identity and relation with the world into question (Ibid., 143). It is in my response to the encounter wherein is defined my own ethical nature (Ibid.). The results of hermeneutic and ethical encounters are not then predetermined, but are produced in the encounter itself (Ibid.). For Levinas, it is impossible not to hear the other’s call. The subject arises in response to the other’s call, it is my experience of a demand that I cannot fully meet and cannot avoid.

#### **4.0.5 Proximity**

Without the proximity of the other in his face everything is absorbed, sunken into, walled in being, goes to the same side, forms a whole, absorbing the very subject to which it is disclosed. Essence, the being of entities, weaves between the incomparables, between me and the others a unity, a community ... and drags us off and assembles us on the same side, chaining us to one another like galley slaves, emptying proximity of its meaning (Levinas 1981, 182).

In pre-ontological proximity as exteriority, a subject is implicated “anarchically” in a way not reducible to principles or a spatial sense since, as a principle, proximity would be representation



(Ibid., 81-82, 100).<sup>15</sup> Proximity here cannot be resolved into “images” or be exposed in a theme (Ibid., 100). The shift that Levinas speaks about is the recognition that the relation with another is not only a knowing or a participation in a common universality, but a prior proximity – the face-to-face contact and my responsibility for the other, as well as a peace incumbent on me in proximity (Horowitz 2000, 301; Levinas 1981, 166-167). Proximity here is described by Levinas “as quite distinct from every other relationship, and it has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self” (Levinas 1981, 46). As humanity, proximity similarly cannot be first understood as consciousness (as the identity of an ego endowed with knowledge, where everything is intentionally assumed) since consciousness is where singularity is lost in its universality (Ibid., 83, 102). Proximity is a disturbance (Ibid., 89).

For Levinas, the will is not autonomous; the subject is not self-determining. The subject is not good voluntarily; goodness chooses the subject that is “chosen without assuming the choice!” before “I have chosen it” “goodness despite itself” keeping “no accounts” (Ibid., 11, 18, 31, 52, 56). “The Good cannot become present or enter into a representation,” as “To reduce the good to being, to its calculations and history, is to nullify goodness” (Ibid., 11, 18). Goodness is not an attribute that can be taken up as to know oneself to be good is to lose goodness (Ibid., 57). “This non-initiative is older than any present, and is not a passivity contemporaneous with and counterpart of any act. It is on the hither side of the free and the non-free, the anarchy of the Good” (Ibid., 74).

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<sup>15</sup> Anarchy for Levinas is not disorder as opposed to order, as disorder is just another order. Anarchy “troubles being over and beyond what is thematizable” since taken literally it is not grounded in a principle but is prior to all principles, “more ancient than the beginning” (Levinas 1981, 101, 165; Levinas 1968, 81). Anarchy is a relation with proximity and substitution and, as such, occurs prior to one’s ontological relation to oneself or to the totality. In the concrete it is the relationship with the neighbour (Levinas 1968, 81).

For Levinas, subjectivity includes not only responsibility for the other, but also substitution for the other as a hostage. To become a hostage, and substitute the self for the other, increases responsibility and frees the self from imprisonment to itself. I am held hostage in the relationship, responding before I have the will to respond (Horowitz 2000, 303). I am *already* a hostage. I am held hostage because my responsibility for the other does not arise from my free choice but is located in the unavoidability of the Other's call. Responsibility as obsession and as hostage is not a will to generosity or to sacrifice, as I am at my most radically passive; responsibility takes place despite myself (Ibid.). Ethical force cannot be reduced to cognitive cogency, to acts of consciousness or will (Cohen 1986, 5). The relationship with the other, with alterity, consists in being contested and appealed to by the other, a movement that comes from without as alterity, not posited by any act of my subjectivity (Lingis 1978, xvii). When Levinas writes of passivity, he does not have in mind a neutral equilibrium of activity and passivity, but rather an ethical imbalance, in which I am subject to the Other's summons, suffering a responsibility such that to assume it and make it internal to my own project, would be to fail in my responsibility (Llewelyn 1991, 84). I undergo the approach, the coming-on-the-scene of the other passively, disinterestedness reflects not being caught up in the order of Being, not able to make it into my own principle; this is the sense of what "being contested consists" (Lingis 1978, xvii). Passivity cannot be reduced to an experience that a subject would have of it (Levinas 1981, 54). This taking up of my responsibilities is not an exercise of power, not even the power of a good will, as it is outside any system of terms in reciprocal relation, outside of any systematicity (Llewelyn 1991, 39, 54). As a hostage, the self is prior to principles, older than the ego, beyond the intentionality of egoism, altruism, "natural benevolence" or love (Levinas 1981, 111, 117). It

is as hostage “that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple “After you, sir,” indicative of a response”” (Ibid.).

#### 4.0.6 Singularity

Levinas begins with a postmodern dimension of a singular subjectivity (Lash 1996, 103). Singularity in the pre-ontological for Levinas means: *no one else can take my place*, as I am unique; uniqueness in responsibility means the impossibility of “slipping away” (Levinas 1981, 56). In the words of Levinas, “I am then called upon in my uniqueness as someone for whom no one else can substitute himself” (Ibid., 59). In the words of Bauman, “we is not the plural of I” (Bauman 2004, 48). God calls Levinas’s subject by name; the command to slay his son is Abraham’s alone (Lash 1996, 92). No one else can respond as a substitute, as responsibility cannot be passed on to someone else (Levinas 1985, 101; Gardiner 1996, 132; Hutchens 2004, 23). The address is not to an abstract *I*, nor to a prescriptive moral code, nor to one’s capacity to fulfilling one’s role in an institutional framework, but the address in Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* (1961) is to a single individual (Gardiner 1996, 92; Levinas 1985, 101). This I as unique singularity, as subjectivity, is unconditionally and non-reciprocally responsible for the other, as well as for the other’s responsibilities, as I am always more responsible than anyone else (Levinas 1985, 99). In opposition to Descartes’s motto of modern philosophy and personhood, Levinas offers the Hebrew phrase *Hineni*, “Here I am” (Parker 1989, 1). According to Levinas, “Here I am” is the full and responsible response to the call of another before, and despite, itself (Ibid.). The I is commanded and made responsible by the Other, denoted in the biblical command, in a concern with “the widow, the stranger, the orphan” (Cohen 1997, 16, 17; Llewelyn 1991, 47; Parker 1989, 1). The command calls from the Other, I *am* ordered, I *am*

obligated (Wall 1999, 37). It is an obedience that precedes hearing the law's command, "Here I am," as the essential "openness" to the Other is an act of exposure and vulnerability (Gardiner 1996, 132; Llewelyn 1991, 274). "To say: here I am *me voici* ... that's it" (Levinas 1985, 97). Levinas's wish is that out of the sheer fact of otherness there is hope for ethical life, as there is nothing else that can protect the "the weak, the poor, the vulnerable," since in a different setting another group will constitute the otherness that is "grist for the mill of power and murder" (Gottlieb 1994, 239).

#### **4.0.7 Not Guilty, But Accused**

In an approach I am first a servant of a neighbor already late and guilty for being late (Levinas 1981, 87).

Levinas argues that subjectivity or self-consciousness is the feeling of being "not guilty, but accused," accused of what one never willed or chose, a guilt without origins or appeasement. In his words: "Responsibility for the other does not wait for the freedom of commitment to the other as commitment. Without ever having done anything, I have always been under accusation" (Levinas 1996d, 89; Levinas 1981, 114).<sup>16</sup> To be a self is to be responsible beyond what one has done oneself, always having done less than one could have. It is about responsibility for every persecution toward those who we do not even know (Levinas 1996d, 81). This is not a representation of the other to which we then respond. "It is already a summons of extreme exigency; an obligation which is anachronistically prior to every engagement" (Ibid.). For Levinas, all those who lived through the years 1939 to 1945 "retained a burn on their sides ... as though they had to bear forever the shame of having survived" (Myers 1999, 272). In affirming

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<sup>16</sup> Commitment already presupposes a theoretical consciousness, ... a taking up that goes beyond the susceptibility of passivity ... Commitment refers ... to an intentional thought, an assumption, a subject open upon a present, representation (Levinas 1981, 137).

“one’s right to be,” self-consciousness, even though it came to exist without intentionality and without any obvious transgression, is not an inoffensive action in which the self takes note of its being. The very presence of the self is an awareness of its existence and similarly an awareness of the “gnawing of conscience” (Ibid., 273). Is it possible that our “coming into being [is] the result of a crime of which [we] are unaware?” (Ibid.) In other words, while I may not be taking another’s life, I am doing nothing to keep someone alive, since I may be consuming something that could save the life of someone starving in the world (Llewelyn 1991, 40). Levinas states,

My being-in-the-world or my “place in the sun,” my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? Pascal’s my “place in the sun” marks the beginning of the image of the usurpation of the whole earth (cited in Myers 1999, 273).

How then to respond to this uneasy sense of being “not guilty, but accused?” If I am not guilty of hurting another I cannot be blamed for it, but if I nevertheless feel accused of it, I can take responsibility for it, easing my conscience, and begin to repair any damage that I might have done (Myers 1999, 273). My responsibility to the Other, because the injury is not specified and therefore not limited to my relation to the Other, is a relation of infinite responsibility, which means there is no escaping it (Levinas 1996b, 20). Subjectivity is consequently ethical from its very first eventful moment, as it is pre-reflective, as one is always already responsible to and for others (Levinas 1996b, 21; Davis 1996, 80; Gardiner 1996, 133). The Other’s command calls forth a subjectivity for-the-other, that is to say, a subjectivity which “fears murder more than death” (Cohen 1997, 17). Responsibility here always weighs on the subject, not in an empathetic sense but, instead, as a response to radical alterity. The proximity of the face-to-face “allows us to understand goodness in another way than as an altruistic inclination to be *satisfied*” (emphasis added) (Levinas 1981, 138).

#### 4.0.8 Responsibility

Levinas's concept of responsibility is a one-way movement containing no reciprocity; it is an exercise that is completely gratuitous (Ibid., 84). The ethical encounter with the Other is asymmetrical and unequal as "the knot of subjectivity consists in going to the other without concerning oneself with his movement toward me" (Davis 1996, 35; Levinas 1981, 84). The other and I are not in correlation, not connected dialectically, a necessity if we were to be in a relation of power; responsibility is a relation that exceeds power (Llewelyn 1991, 28; Wall 1999, 33). Levinas's decoupling of responsibility from reciprocity has been described as the decisive act that distinguishes his ethical theory from virtually all others (Bauman 2004, 220; Davis 1996, 51). For Levinas,

[the] intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense I am responsible for the other, without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. It is precisely insofar as the relation between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subjection to the Other; and I am "subject" essentially in this sense. It is I who support all. The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others (Levinas 1985, 98, 99).

This inequality, this not-asking-for-reciprocation, this disinterest in mutuality, this indifference to the "balancing up" of gains or rewards, this "unbalanced" and hence non-reversible character of the I/Other relationship is what makes the encounter a moral event (Bauman 2004, 48-49). In this way Levinas binds the existence of the subject, the I, to a situation in which there is no slipping away from responsibility to the other. Responsibility empties the I of its imperialism and its egoism.

#### 4.0.9 Desire Beyond Need

Levinas does not ignore our need to take from nature. Rather he acknowledges our need to survive and, in describing this need notes that, prior to secularization, being was thought to

have been given existence by divine decree. This idea changed radically as a result of contemporary philosophy and the Scientific Revolution and was re-constituted as the “struggle for life” (Diehm 2003, 182). Living beings therefore “strive” to exist in the tension between being and nonbeing, engaging in the struggle that beings, whose existence has no divine guarantee, must endure to maintain their tenuous hold on life (Ibid.). Levinas acknowledges the concept of “need” as a motive of self-concern, a struggle for life without ethics, a relation with oneself, with nothing which is other (Diehm 2000, 51). Levinas is not critical of need. Unaware of the challenge of the Other, the self finds itself in an alien environment, surrounded by objects which comply with or oppose its needs, but it is not in exile; on the contrary, it feels entirely at home in the world. The strangeness of the world is its charm, a cause of happiness (Davis 1996, 43). Levinas describes this order of things as an existence, which is essentially appropriative and recuperative of oneself (Diehm 2000, 51). Need leads to seeking, finding, grasping, assimilating, same-making, totalizing (Ajzenstat 2001, 65). Levinas depicts need as a material dependence which the self fulfils and satisfies but he makes a distinction between need and Desire (Davis 1996, 43). Levinas states that Desire rather than need commands acts (Levinas 1969, 299). Need for the other can be fulfilled but it is our insatiable Desire without end, an attraction by something not needed, by the otherness of the other, the strangeness, transcendence, alterity, the exteriority of the Other that cannot and is never satisfied (Ibid., 34). Satisfaction is impossible because the closer one gets the more evident the alterity of the other becomes. The meaning of Desire for Levinas is transcendence, exteriority, Otherness, concretized in ethics as a Desire divorced from my needs precisely because it is centred on the concrete needs of the Other, occurring across materiality in giving.

#### **4.0.10            The Unreasonable**

It is in ethics that something new happens, something unprecedented in the life of a being concerned with its survival (Diehm 2000, 51). Ethics is something radically un-economical (Ibid., 51). It is a break with a being-for-itself, whereby the life of the other is more important than my life, a “mode of proximity to the other and to alterity ... a surplus of sociality and love where love is conceived first of all as “fear for the other”” (Horowitz 2000, 295).<sup>17</sup> The ethical relation is not only primordially prior to, the reason of the said, it is in fact unreasonably illogical (Ibid., 302, 304, 305). Reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes the self moral: “that unfounded, non-rational, unarguable, no excuses given and non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may” (Bauman 2004, 247). Reason is about making correct decisions, while ethical responsibility precedes all thinking about decisions, as it does not and cannot care about any logic that would allow the approval of an action as correct (Ibid., 247-248). In other words, as Levinas says, “man is an unreasonable animal” and it is not reason that can liberate man, but the capacity to break with reason by putting the needs of the Other first. Levinas is arguing for a definition of rationality that brings out that the height of rationality is what, by the standards of rationality as traditionally understood, would be deemed the height of folly (Llewelyn 1991, 67). Levinas calls this “folly at the confines of reason” (Levinas 1981, 50). As Bauman says, “At the far end of the long march of reason, moral nihilism waits” (Bauman 2004, 248). Ethics cannot be derived from reason as ethics is not a form of knowledge.

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<sup>17</sup> In neither Kant nor in Heidegger is the mortality of the other given priority over my own as in Levinas (Llewelyn 1991, 80).



#### 4.0.11 The Saying and the Said

It was Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) who provided the first extended discussion (both an admiration and a Derridean deconstructive reading) of Levinas's work in "Violence and Metaphysics" published in two parts in 1964 and then reprinted with significant modifications in 1967 in *Writing and Difference* (1978) (Critchley 2002, 2). Derrida highlighted in "Violence and Metaphysics" that the exteriority Levinas strived to achieve was necessarily located in the language of ontology, lodged within traditional conceptuality. The contradiction is maintained, what intends to escape ontology, remains, as Derrida suggested, expressed in ontological terms, since the attempt to find an ethical opening beyond ontological language is in language. Levinas expresses this when he states that, "the correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands" (Levinas 1981, 6). Levinas confessed that he was "tormented" by Derrida's probing questions, and as a consequence, in his second major philosophical book, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974) Levinas attempted to get away from ontological language by distinguishing between the saying and the said. Simply put, the saying is ethical, and the said is ontological, and Levinas uses the distinction to explain how the ethical signifies within ontological language how "Language permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this *outside of being*" (Levinas, 1981, 6). "The responsibility for another is precisely as saying prior to anything said" (Ibid., 43).

"Saying runs the risk of being absorbed as soon as the said is formulated" yet, "what is absorbed is not exhausted in the manifestation" as the saying imprints its trace on thematization (Ibid., 47). Thus, even though the saying is betrayed in the said, the said retains a trace of the ethical saying. As John Llewelyn states, there is a remainder of the saying, once it has been said,

that he compares to the smile left behind after the subtraction of the face of the Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (Llewelyn 1991, 63). For every unsaying there immediately accrues another said, calling to be unsaid again to infinity (Ibid.). This opposition does not mean that the saying can dispense with the said, in fact "the said dominates the saying which states it" yet, as soon as *the otherwise than being* is conveyed, the unavoidable betrayal takes place in the said (Levinas 1981, 7). In the words of Levinas, "It is by the approach, the one-for-the-other of saying, related by the said, that the said remains an insurmountable equivocation, where meaning refuses simultaneity, does not enter into being, does not compose a whole" (Ibid., 170). Levinas admits that there must be comparison, thematization, thought and history, yet everything rests on an ethical relation that is prior: the saying that precedes the said. The difference between *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974) is that the former is an articulation of the non-ontological experience of the face of the other in the language of ontology, while the latter is a performative enactment of an ethical writing which endlessly runs up against the limits of language and ontology" (Critchley 2002, 19).

Simon Critchley is of the opinion that the turn to Levinas was motivated by the question of whether the Derridean version of deconstruction had any ethical status (Ibid., 4). Critchley supports the correlation of textual alterity and the alterity of the other. This is a point at which the question of ethics and the question of language come quite close. While Derrida is regarded as playing a pivotal role in the development of Levinas's thought, Levinas similarly influenced Derrida to a great degree, evidenced in Derrida's claim that "the originary impulse of deconstruction lies in the "call" of the "oft-abused other" deconstruction being a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons, or motivates it" (Davis 1996, 63;

McGowan 1991, 91). Deconstruction is a vocation – a response to a call (Ibid.). The other, as other than self, the other that opposes self-identity precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject, rather than being constituted by it (McGowan 1991, 91-92). In *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1999) Critchley's argument is that Derridean deconstruction can, and in fact should, be understood as an ethical demand, provided that ethics is understood in the Levinasian sense. His contention is that one of the reasons that Derrida's work has not been read as an ethical demand is due either to an avoidance, or an ignorance of the novel conception of ethics in Levinas's thinking (Critchley 1999, 3).

Yet Levinas, in theorizing a rejection of Western metaphysics, is aware that it is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a position that can step outside the metaphysical tradition. Paradoxically, even as one acknowledges why totality is in such disfavour, it may be impossible to abandon it entirely. It has been shown that leave-taking of the tradition never quite succeeds. Reactions against or negations of concepts reconfirm their status. The more monolithic, Hegelian moment in Derrida confirms the inevitability of the unresolved dialectic between totality and anti-totality, as he maintains that we cannot have access to something that is outside, an absolute other or absolute negation (McGowan 1991, 90). Derrida argues that counter concepts quickly become the foundation of a new system (Ibid.). Leave-taking of the tradition governs Derrida's deconstructive double-reading as the attempt to escape Western metaphysics.

At the same time, the more plural, Nietzschean and (dare we say) Levinasian moment in Derrida wants to find ways to keep the other from being reconciled to its opposite in the dialectical movement towards the same (Ibid.). If Western metaphysics and language are systems that imply one another, then the only true outside would be beyond language. Levinas is important because he tries to occupy such terrain, pointing toward the experience of an/other that

cannot be captured in words in his attempt to find an exit from being. What then is this encounter with the absolutely other? Neither representation, nor limitation, nor conceptual relation to the same, the ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship (Ibid., 99). The difficulty however remains, as even rejection presupposes its own legitimacy in its claims to its own self-presentation as truthful, even if those claims may argue against themselves. In other words, the subscription to an “outside” or a “before” invariably runs into the difficulty of arguing from “within the four walls of systemic knowledge” which one may be critiquing as, “Philosophical discourse can only say the Other in the language of the Same, unable to be fully inside or outside its host discourse, determined in its habits of thought by that which it rejects” (Davis 1996, 66). The difficulty derives from relying on a vocabulary and way of thinking, which is being discredited, thereby restoring what is being dislodged (Ibid., 59). Yet in this failure lies the only possibility of success; while the struggle to unsay what has been said is an impossibility, the failure must at least describe the ordeal accurately.

#### **4.0.12 A Levinasian Ethics of the Other Beyond the Human**

Once defined, the nonhuman other disappears into its new description: it is drawn into a symbolic system which orders and explains, interprets and assigns value (Evernden 1992, 131).

If we are seeking the fundamental basis of an ethical response, that basis cannot be worldly; it cannot be within the dialectic of culture and nature, or at the level of perception and thought. The basis for responsiveness is in the call for a more radical Outside. Nature in this radical sense is, if anything, the refusal of the hegemony of perception, language, and thought, it is the “pocket of resistance” and the unpredictable *par excellence* (Toadvine 2003, 149-150).

John Llewelyn ascribes to Levinas and Kant similar views in that humans have responsibilities for animals, but not directly to them (Llewelyn 1991, 64). Llewelyn feels that “Levinas is so preoccupied with doing justice to the human being that he fails to do justice to the non-human being” (Ibid., 114). Levinas himself, when pressed to respond about the non-human other, seems to be ambivalent. Levinas is not sure if the Other can be non-human. In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas did not consider an animal to have a face (Atterton 2004, 270). In an interview in 1986, however, Levinas appeared to have more difficulty with the question, evident in his statement: “One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog ... The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog ... But it also has a face” (Ibid.). When asked if the commandment “Thou shall not kill” is not also expressed in the face of an animal, Levinas equivocated, “I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called ‘face.’ I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed” (Ibid., 271).<sup>18</sup>

Yet forging an ecological ethic would insist that this Other can be any other, and Levinas’s philosophy, if it is to remain consistent with its spirit of alterity, responsibility and asymmetry, can be interpreted to represent the relationship with the non-human other. The break with a being-for-itself, a disordering of myself, and an orientation towards the other, is established for Levinas by the face-to-face encounter. The Levinasian face “escapes representation; it is the very collapse of phenomenality. Not because it is too brutal to appear, but because in a sense too weak; non-phenomenon because less than a phenomenon” (Levinas 1981, 88). The question, which must then be asked, is not whether the other suffers (as done by Jeremy

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<sup>18</sup> While literature on this issue acknowledges that Levinas vacillates at times it also recognizes that, for the most part, like Kant, he does not ascribe the ethical relationship to anything beyond the human.

Bentham's utilitarianism), but whether the face of the non-human other can produce a break and disturb a being-for-itself? In other words, can the non-human have a face?

The face, for Levinas, is not a phenomenal appearance or empirical fact; it is not a relation of perception or vision (the search for adequation that absorbs being), as to see the face would make of it an intentional object of experience and make it susceptible to the inadequacies of the phenomenological act, whereby consciousness conveys meaning on the world around it (Critchley 2002, 12; Davis 1996, 46; Diehm 2000, 52; Levinas 1985, 87). The face is not the colour of the eyes or skin, and alterity, which cannot be reduced to simple difference, does not consist in relative differences in facial features: "The other must be received independently of his qualities, if he is to be received as other" (Levinas 1985, 85-86). In other words, what makes the other the Other is not specific attributes, but alterity itself. The skin of the face, in its nudity and exposure is destitute, containing an essential poverty that we try to mask by putting on poses and taking on a continence (Ibid., 86). The face, as exposed, invites us to acts of violence, and yet the face is what forbids us to kill, as the meaning of the face says "thou shalt not kill;" the prohibition and its ontological reversal is described by Levinas as follows:

Murder, it is true, is a banal fact: one can kill the Other; the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity. The prohibition against killing does not render murder impossible, even if the authority of the prohibition is maintained in the bad conscience about the accomplished evil (Ibid., 87).

The face, even though it may be a privileged location for encountering the other, is not limited to the face (Ibid., 174). Because it is not the individual of a genus who approaches, saying can, for Levinas, break through the limits of language and culture (Horowitz 2000, 305). Levinas's writings provide a way in which the unbridgeable gap between human beings and other animals can act as the very source of ethical relevance.

The face for Levinas is “a fundamental event,” never quite an object but a “happening” which is ethical in the sense that the event of being faced by the other puts into question the I concerned with itself (cited in Diehm 2000, 52). The face is the one who is destitute, who has been laid low, the one “to whom I am obliged” and for whom I can find the resources to respond to the call (Levinas 1985, 89). Precisely because the other is in need and weak (the widow, the stranger, the orphan), the other commands from a position of height (height is asymmetry). It is the asymmetrical condition of the ethical relationship which is here impressed, as the face does not claim an economical reciprocation, but rather claims the I absolutely, breaking with the economical altogether, a situation which is both applicable and absolving of the non-human (Diehm 2000, 52). What summons me to responsibility is the expression of the other’s nakedness; the *vulnerability* of the other’s face, nape, body, or the hand one shakes “faces us” as an ethical command (Ibid., 56). If the claim of the incarnate other is the claim of the one who is weak, vulnerable, exposed to violation, then it is difficult to hold any radical distinction between the alterity of the human and that of the other-than-human. As Levinas has said, “[t]he human face is the face of the world itself” (Levinas 1996c, 73). Humans, the earth, animals, plants: all life is the face, as there is a frailty, vulnerability there which commands us all with the sheer otherness of the non-human world. It is the radical alterity and absence of reciprocity of the non-human that make an even stronger case for Levinasian ethics in regard to the non-human world.

Even though Levinas shows some ambivalence with respect to whether the face of the non-human can command me, forging an ecological ethic maintains that the Other can be “any other,” the other can be found on faces other-than-human, even on the face of the earth (Diehm 2003, 171). For ultimately, it is only a voice from beyond which can call us to responsibility for this planet of ours. If the only voice we hear can always be assimilated to our own project and

projections, then the very idea of responsibility makes no sense. For responsibility is responsiveness, a responsiveness to another's need, implying our being addressed in the accusative by someone, or something, both before and other than ourselves.

#### **4.0.13 From Ethics to Politics and Back in Levinas**

Justice remains justice only in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest (Levinas 1981, 159).

Levinas tells us that his ethics must lead to some theory of justice, but he does not detail what this theory might be (Critchley 2002, 27). It is possible to be genuinely uncertain about which course of action to follow in specific situations, but the strength of Levinas's position lies in reminding us of the nature of the ethical demand which must be presupposed at the basis of all moral theories, and hence enactments of justice (Ibid., 2). Given the innumerable conflicting demands of the political condition, how can we reconcile the seemingly private ethical relationship Levinas sets up in his "moral party of two," in his "Garden of Eden," with all the diverse and oft times conflicting calls and claims for justice in the political (Bauman 1999, 151; Davis 1996, 9)? As Levinas says: "If proximity ordered me only to the other alone, there would not have been any problem, even in the most general sense of the term" (Levinas 1981, 157). Clearly, Levinas's "party of two" is the domain of the ethical, a condition in which there is only one given other, other than myself, in which morality and justice exist simultaneously: a condition capable of sustaining the universe on its own, with no need of codes or rules, reason or knowledge, argument or conviction, a primal scene of morality 'before' everything (Bauman 1999, 151; Llewelyn 1991, 37). This is the original face-to-face; not a power relation, outside any struggle of wills, beyond any calculations (Llewelyn 1991 p. 37, 41). In the "moral party of



two” actions cannot be classified as egoistic or altruistic, as the I and the Other are irreplaceable, it makes no sense to think of actions in terms of “interests” (Ibid.). It is inside this party that my responsibility is unlimited and cannot be fulfilled and it is under this condition that the command needs no argument or threat to gain authority (Ibid).

A grouping of two cannot provide “rules of conduct” for society and a grouping of three cannot be ethical and while Levinas blurs the distinction, it is not abandoned entirely (Ibid., 50, 54). Thus, the relation with the Other is never uniquely the relation with the Other, as the third is always already represented in the Other. There is no pure immediacy, no saying without a said, no ethics without ontology, as the ethical relation is always already troubled and problematized by the demand for justice (Critchley 1999, 230). The bridge from the Other to the others is not chronological; rather the others “concern me from the first” (Levinas 1981, 159). The transformation from the “party of two” to the just society begins with the Other, who is the third; the third is never absent from the eyes of the Other (Bauman 2004, 112; Llewelyn 1991, 128). The relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity: “If I am alone with the Other, I owe him everything ... [but] there is a necessity to moderate this privilege of the Other” (Levinas 1981, 158; Levinas 1985, 90). The third party/justice paradoxically puts a limit on responsibility, allowing for the question of distributive justice to emerge, — namely, a comparison of claims (Critchley 1999, 231). The third party reveals the potential existence of innumerable subjects, any of whom, including me, can play the role of Other to all others (Davis 1996, 83). The discovery of the third party disturbs the intimacy of my relationship with the Other, provoking a questioning that opens up broader perspectives for society (Ibid., 83). The third introduces a contradiction into the saying that, prior to the entrance of the third party, only went “in one direction” (Levinas 1981, 157). The third is the “birth of the

question: What do I have to do with justice?" (Ibid.) For Levinas, "justice is necessary, that is comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus, intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system" (Ibid.). The ethical relationship is not a private affair, "self-sufficient" or "forgetful of the universe" but places itself within a political context, in the full light of the public order (Critchley 1999, 223; Critchley 2002, 24-25). Justice is not founded on universal principles; justice, society and institutions are comprehensible out of proximity (Levinas 1981, 159). In the words of Levinas, "This means that nothing is outside of the control of the responsibility of the one for the other" and it means that I can also claim justice for myself because I am "an other like the others" (Ibid., 159, 161). Levinas states that, "the relationship between the neighbour and the third party cannot be indifferent to me when I approach" as there is "also justice for me" (Ibid. 16, 159). The asymmetry of my responsibility for the Other does not mean that I cannot expect to be treated with fairness and respect. As Simon Critchley explains, the community has a double structure, since it is a commonality among equals, which is at the same time based on the inegalitarian moment of the ethical relation (Critchley 1999, 227). The simultaneous revelation of the other and the third party allows Levinas to combine asymmetry and equality within the social relation (Davis 1996, 53). The step beyond the responsibilities of the individual subject is made possible by the third. In the other, we connect to the third person, which is the universal. For Levinas, the third "is the birth of thought, consciousness, justice and philosophy" (Levinas 1981, 128, 160). With the advent of justice justified violence comes on the scene and this is precisely why the ethical relation is necessarily impossible.

Levinas's thinking does not result in apoliticism or ethical quietism; rather ethics leads back to politics, to the demand for a just polity (Critchley 2002, 24). What would it mean then, to have politics mediated ethically, to have ethics lead back to politics, to the demand for justice? Politics provides the continual horizon of Levinasian ethics, while "*ethics is ethical for the sake of politics* – that is, for the sake of a new conception of the organization of political space," for the sake of a more just society (Critchley 1999, 223; Critchley 2002, 24-25). Levinas allows us to look at justice and politics in terms not alien to reason (Horowitz 2000, 300). He does not confront or reject reason, or systemic and logical thinking, as they have their place; they are required for the establishment of power structures that satisfy necessary needs and protect us against the excesses of violence (Lash 1996, 93; Wild 1969, 14, 18). While reason is necessary, it is also not enough. What he wants to criticize is the belief that *only* political rationality can answer political problems (Critchley 2002, 24; Levinas 1969, 300). For Levinas, the state, institutions and the courts that they support reveal themselves to an inhuman determinism – politics makes it essential to return to its motivation in the "justice and a foundational inter-humanity" of the intersubjective relationship, proximity, the face-to-face encounter (Levinas 1997b, 104-105). For Levinas, justice, exercised through the inevitability of institutions, must always be held in check by the initial interpersonal relationship, everything begins as if there were only two (Levinas, 1985, 90). Prior to these systems that are necessary to meet needs, and presupposed by them, is the individual (Wild 1969, 14). Responsibility unfolds outside the state and the rational order, resting upon the irreducible ethical responsibility of the face-to-face encounter. The state cannot be genuinely pluralistic since, in the interest of justice for all, "there are cruelties which are terrible because they stem from that very necessity for rational order ... there are tears that the functionary cannot see" (Gardiner 1996, 133). The institutions of totality,

including law, politics and history, can only judge the individual as a universal I, excluding the I as a singularity from the totality (Lash 1996, 93). In the words of Levinas,

the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. But politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus as in absentia (Levinas 1969, 300).

For Levinas, the relation of ethics to politics, and the move back to politics after the ethical moment has been delineated, can be stated as a move back to the said, a return and reopening of the question of justice, politics, community and ontology, as well as the question of questioning itself (Levinas 1981, 128; Critchley 1999, 228, 220-221) Levinas understands the necessity of the “betrayal,” of the saying in the said (Critchley 1999, 230). The return to the said is not a return to the pure said of ontology, but to a said that maintains the trace of ethical saying within itself (Ibid., 232). Even though ethics is distinct from justice, it is also the fundamental requirement of justice, since justice must allow its justice to be ruptured and disrupted by ethics (Ajzenstat 2001, 52). In the order of the ethical relation, the I and the other occupy a diachronic order. In the order of justice, the I and the Other occupy the same synchronic order: we are co-citizens, and while ethically I cannot demand that the other be good – I am simply responsible to him or her – at the level of politics I am entitled to judge (Critchley 1999, 232). For Levinas, judgment is political judgment (Ibid.).

## **Section V THE DISCOURSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IS BASED ON THE ETHICAL RELATIONSHIP**

### **5.0 A Justified Post-Levinasian Environmental Movement**

The question is how to translate the relation with the Other to all the Others, already present from the very beginning. How to respond responsibly and concretely? Levinas's ethics are more than concern, they occur across materiality in giving the bread from one's mouth, as "It is not a gift of the heart" as "only a subject that eats can be for the other" (Levinas 1981, 74). Likewise, he does not provide a formula based on reason because his entire enterprise is *not* to provide principles, but to access, via phenomenology, a moment (that passes all too quickly) and remind us of its 'happening.' His task is to cause us to remember that the realm of justice cannot justify itself, it has in its self-sufficiency forgotten (forgotten that it has forgotten) what makes its own possibility possible. That task is incumbent on the ethical event, and the environmental movement can be viewed as the attempt to practically delineate the ethical in the realm of the political. The environmental movement is in the order of the reason of the said, a political response in the realm of ontology. It is also otherwise, infused with the saying that cannot be disentangled from it, that overflows it, coming back as a trace. Ethics requires the third, and environmentalism can be seen as the organized systemic/political/state/institutional manifestation of the totality, wherein is located the trace as a response to the non-human other. The political, as the calling into question of critique, is a requirement of the ethical. The intent of turning to the environmental movement is to show how in the realm of the third, the role of the movement is to bring the ethical relationship into thematization. To not thematize would isolate the duality and leave it vulnerable to the excessive tyranny of the asymmetrical that excludes responsibility to all the others. Environmentalism is the political negotiation of our environmental responses to the

ethical relationship with the non-human world, a response that does not forget nor simply philosophize its betrayal of the ethical. This is the context in which the environmental movement is herein articulated in a post-Levinasian world. And as such, it must be articulated as more than knowledge, principle, and theme, it also requires just action. It is in the Appendix that the paper will address such action.

## Section VI

### 6.0 Conclusion

The discussions in this paper have been entered into with the hope of bringing to environmental conversations some insights in the field of theory. The discourses that were presented with respect to our relationship with nature are not separate from discussions reflected in the philosophical tradition, and the paper has tried to give a rendering of some of the debates and paths taken in the conversations, with the understanding that, as discourses, they always took place after the ethical moment had passed. This was not to diminish discourse but to place it into a context that in a sense worked backward. I have also attempted in this paper to contextualize environmentalism itself as well as the wider field of theory. In this respect, the paper has discussed a certain crisis of our times in a post-metaphysical age that entails the abandonment of the hoped-for progress of history, under the guidance of Enlightenment rationality, including the more recent eschewing of all appeals to ontological, epistemological or ethical absolutes that have emerged with the turn in theory to a poststructural/postmodern hegemony. But the end of essences and metaphysics does not mean the end of ethics, and it is in fact with the end of metaphysics that ethics finally comes into its own (Cohen 1985, 4). As Richard Cohen states in the Introduction to *Ethics and Infinity* (1985):

*What* ethics is does not survive the end of metaphysics – but only because ethics never *was* or *is* anything. Ethics does not have an essence, its “essence,” so to speak, is precisely not to have an essence, to unsettle essences. Its “identity” is precisely not to have an identity, to undo identities. Its “being” is not to be but to be *better than being*. Ethics is precisely ethics by disturbing the complacency of being (or of non-being, being’s correlate) (Ibid.,10).

It is in a responsibility for the non-human as the remotest other, inaccessible to our cognitive powers while still phenomenologically accessible (as an ethical command/summons), that the

Levinasian ethical encounter has been posited as “an ethics of ethics” that can address the seeming ethical void with which the refusal of totality has been associated. And while a Levinasian environmental ethic precedes a politics of the environment, the environmental movement as a manifestation of the Levinasian trace of the saying can be discussed as a responsibility for the radical alterity of nature as the non-human other.

There are differing philosophical understandings of environmentalism, however, and one of the tasks of a post-Levinasian philosophy of environmentalism is to engage the distinctions and differentiations. It is not in those forms of philosophical environmentalism that differ radically, but in those that come quite close to Levinas, that the exercise becomes more poignant, as it is here that the finer points of what makes Levinas particularly applicable to an environmental ethic becomes more pronounced. It is by looking at Neil Evernden’s *The Social Creation of Nature* (1992) as such an example (where the closeness is both remarkable yet omits the crucial element of what a post-Levinasian environmental ethic could mean) that we will turn our attention.

Evernden, in the section, *The Liberation of Nature*, speaks of having an actual experience, not a cultural explanation of otherness (Evernden 1992, 110). He quotes Merleau-Ponty’s statement of the phenomenological method as a direct experience of the world: “To return to thing themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge” (cited in Evernden 1992, 110). Evernden also points to the experience of childhood as a time when nature is not encountered formally or abstractly, “before the small human becomes forever a creature of culture and must dwell in the domain of abstractions and representations” (Ibid., 114). It is in childhood where all “the beauty of things” from nature cannot be assimilated (Ibid., 117).

Evernden speaks about a kinship between the experience of nature in childhood and the



experience of the “wholly other” in the religious preoccupation of Rudolph Otto that Evernden believes can be secularized. Here the significance of otherness, removed from explanation, is described as “awe,” seemingly the only appropriate response beyond *conception*, but not beyond *experience* (Ibid., 116). Explanation of any phenomenon makes it “one of” something else, another instance of the same (Ibid., 117). Acceptance of it “*in its full individuality* as a unique and astonishing *event*” makes the encounter fundamentally religious in an attitudinal, nonecclesiastical sense, as radical otherness is at the base of all awe and astonishment, something quite different from anything that can be rendered in rational concepts, something absolutely wondrous that transcends thought (emphasis in original) (Ibid.).

Similarly, Evernden refers to R.W. Hepburn’s suggestion that the wonder that nature invokes does not imply possession but permits the other to remain unmastered and other (Ibid., 118). It is in wonder that we accept the presence of something entirely distinct and self-possessed, never ours in any sense but “ultrahuman,” where “ultra” in this usage refers to that which is “beyond” humanity. It was Richard Jeffries the naturalist (who is credited with the term ultrahuman) who came to the term out of what he referred to as “the old error,” premised upon the fact that the creatures he loved and appreciated did not return this care to him in a reciprocal manner (Ibid.). Jeffries comments that “All nature, the universe far as we see, is anti- or ultrahuman, outside, and has no concern with man” as we can never know it or own it, as it is *beyond* (cited in Evernden 1992, 118). Viewed by Evernden as liberating, this stance releases nature from being a personal interpretation to being *its own* (Ibid.).

But while the phenomenological experience of “the things themselves” before cognition, and otherness beyond essence is herein depicted, what is missing is the ethical turn, precisely what Levinas gave to phenomenology. This is what Levinas’s ethical turn – not situated in

empathy and reciprocity, but as a response to the otherness of the other – can give to environmentalism as an encounter, where “The I always has *one* responsibility more than all the others” (Levinas 1985, 99). Returning to “the things themselves” may transcend the subject/object distinction, while awe, wonder, and miracles may be the beyond of nature as an acknowledgment of radical otherness, but Levinas says more than this. He says that the I cannot remain *indifferent* (even though nature can) as “There is no eluding or declining the appeal, I cannot slip away from the call” (Levinas 1981, 53, 85). The phenomenological description offers ecological investigation an alternative point of departure, however, it is the ethical turn as the responsibility for another that is the unique Levinasian contribution. Environmental theories, in ascribing indifference to nature, inadvertently reflect nature’s indifference into our relationship with nature in such a way that the projection contains an embedded symmetrical indifference. It is in the disengagement from instrumentality and the recognition of radical alterity that much environmentalism absolves us of any responsibility by omission; what is explicitly required is an expression of asymmetrical responsibility. This exclusion is addressed by Levinas. This is how the otherness of the other elicits responsibility as the very founding moment of subjectivity and what Levinas can bring to environmental theory. Here radical alterity, rather than indifference, imposes an obligation where the I is responsible to the point of substitution. Here is the meaning of Levinas’s phrase, “an ethics of ethics” that represents the additional obligatory element that Levinas can bring to environmental thought, responsibility for the otherness of the other “is the impossibility of being silent” (Ibid., 143).

## **Section VII    ADDENDUM**

### **7.0      The Call of the World, Windshare, the Response**

The first step in establishing a new social order appears to be the construction of a new nature that will justify, even demand, its implementation (Evernden 1992, 16).

While Levinasian ethics does not prescribe a practical plan or direction, the question that must be asked is, what would it mean to have the call of the non-human other responded to ethically, to have environmental ethics lead back to the demand for environmental justice? A Levinasian understanding would require that ethical responsibility for the irreducible otherness of the non-human is always present as a trace in the concrete practice of responding. Responsibility by its very nature cannot avoid a response. Because Levinas's ethical transcendence occurs across the sheer physicality of material experience, where action must be taken, and while searching for new technological capabilities with respect to environmental responsibility alone is not a solution, at the same time, dismissing alternative technological innovation eliminates valuable contributions to a situation that warrants immediate attention. A responsible response cannot avoid a search for policy proposals. The presentation of this addendum proposes that priority be given to renewable energy production, to do everything possible to encourage its development and use. It is also designed to look at Toronto's Windshare project as a tangible response that is the manifestation of such a policy alternative.

While historically the Ontario electricity market has been operated as a public service monopoly, the issue of privatization was put on the public agenda and with the passage of Bill 35, Ontario's Energy Competition Act, the stage was set for a radical transformation of the generation and retail sectors of the electricity marketplace. As a result of the deregulation process, and the most recent government initiation of Standard Offer Contracts for projects of 10 MW or less, it has become possible not only for the consumption, but, for local generation and

production of electricity to take place. And so we turn to the Toronto Renewable Energy Co-operative (TREC), created by the North Toronto Green Community, a neighbourhood-based environmental group that addresses the environmental and social issues around energy production. TREC saw the possibility created by the deregulation of electricity in Ontario to shift control and responsibility for power directly to individuals and communities. In so doing it managed to return to direct democratic control the means of production and consumption challenging the separation of production and consumption in the logic of capitalism. This situation has created an opportunity to determine electrical power generation in Ontario in a way that harmonizes with natural cycles, does not create emissions or hazardous waste, and gives individuals the additional possibility of taking part in their own governance; becoming both producers and consumers of electricity – not a small feat in a society where our sense of helpless alienation (the more postmodern term would be fragmentation) is profound.

Wind energy needs support, but it also needs specifically designed planning policies with respect to land use. At the present time, the Province has committed to implementing a Standard Offer Contract, also known as an Advanced Renewable Tariffs program, recognizing the uniqueness of smaller renewable energy projects.<sup>19</sup> The Ontario Ministry of Energy and its implementation agency, the Ontario Power Authority, are going to make an announcement concerning the details of a program that, if designed properly, could make it possible for 1000s of MW of renewable energy to be developed across Ontario. Standard Offer Contracts will enable farmers, co-operatives, municipalities, First Nations and small businesses to build and

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<sup>19</sup>Standard Offer Contracts are very new and crucial to the development of small community power projects such as Windshare as they guarantee a standard purchase price for power for a period of 20 years at \$0.11/k Wh with small yearly increases to partially account for inflation. By guaranteeing a power purchase above the level of the Ontario price cap, they help wind power become more competitive with other forms of power generation such as nuclear, natural gas and renewables such as hydro (which have been continually subsidized).

generate wind, solar, biogas and small hydro projects. The Advanced Renewable Tariffs could aid in revolutionizing the way that Ontarians relate to electricity and help the province meet electricity generation demand from renewable sources. By enabling community power projects, we may realize a cultural sensibility that begins to conceive of power production in terms that work with natural process. Positive benefits would include local investment in rural economically depressed agricultural communities, allowing farmers to keep farming. Unions have shown an interest in becoming part of the development of the wind industry in Ontario, perhaps a means to shift workers from the automotive sector to turbine production. Other countries with Standard Offer Contracts have managed to significantly increase their renewable energy capacity, in addition to showing a dramatic increase in industrial and job developments associated with the renewable energy sector.

The placement of the wind turbine on Toronto's lakeshore represents the first wind turbine in an urban centre in North America. This is a new development with respect to the energy sector in this province. The turbine has begun the process of making into a 'movement' in Ontario what has previously been an array of marginalized energy/power approaches. These have consisted of rural solutions to energy needs on the farm, an answer to those who go where the cost of the grid is prohibitive, or those employing a radical individualism using isolated 'power guerrilla' tactics in forging an alternative method for the production of electricity. The co-operative model wind turbine project is about changing not only how we produce power but also how we structure the 'ownership' and 'management' of that power once it is produced. Windshare presents us with a means of changing our collective activity. This is not to dismiss that the work of finding any real long-term solution to the environmental crisis means that we must make some radical changes to the ways in which we live, but, at the same time, it is to be

able to address and respond to the radical alterity of nature in the political realm, an institutional response that has retained an ethical trace.

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